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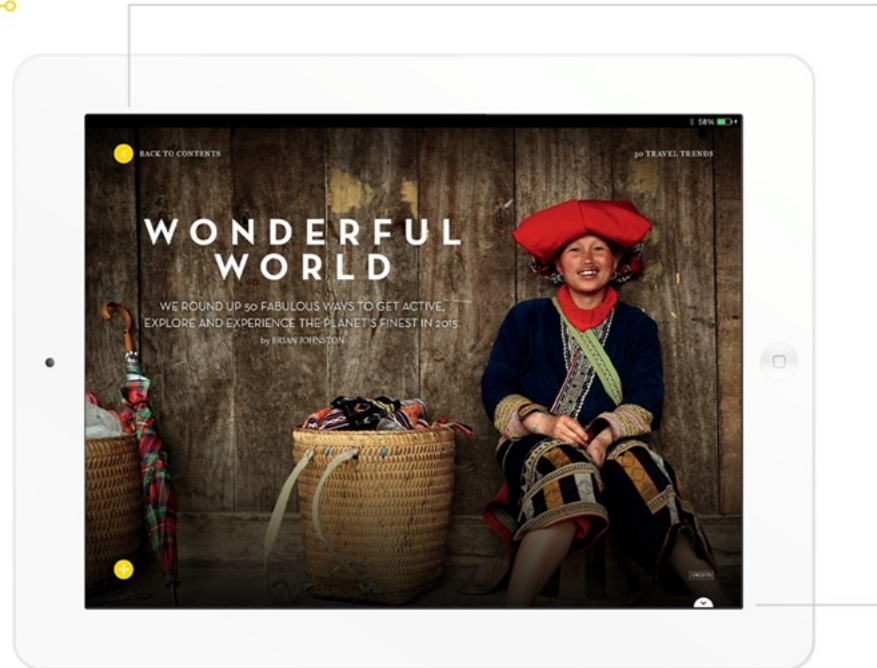
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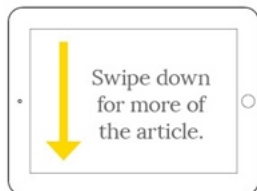
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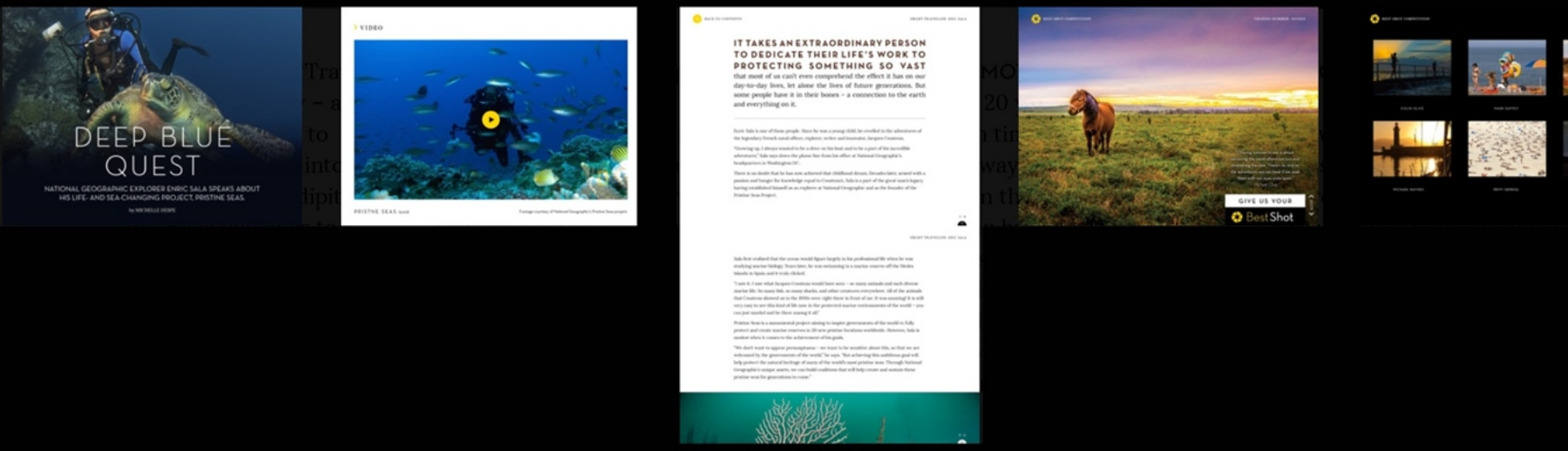


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A new perspective

I RECENTLY VISITED KAKADU National Park in the Northern Territory. The sheer amount of wildlife in Kakadu is mindblowing, and the ancient gorges, rivers, canyons, plains and plateaus – many the keepers of sacred aboriginal rock art tens of thousands of years old – are surreal in their beauty.

While there, I learnt that one of the most carriers of ancient spirit in the Northern Territory is the saltwater crocodile – for thousands of years Aboriginal people have respected this incredible animal that existed in prehistoric times.

Unfortunately most people who have come across a crocodile would have only witnessed them in captivity, which certainly doesn't help their reputation of being deadly animals out to get human beings. In the wild, whether they are sunning themselves on a riverside, ambling through swampland or gliding through river waters, they are undeniably graceful – even beautiful. And after my trip to Kakadu, where I was able to see salties only metres away from me, I've gone from being terrified of them, to having a great respect for them, and for the place they call home.

I think that's one of the best things about travel. It changes your perspective and in turn, can change your life. With that in mind, in this issue, I've chosen travel stories that are personal, and that are the result of our writers being changed by their experiences.

Juan Manuel Gomez journeys through Mexico to trace his roots and learn more about his country's fascinating history; Miranda Luby spends time in Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka, hanging out with the locals ten years after the 2004 tsunami decimated their home. David McGonigal takes his wife on the trip of a lifetime to Botswana to show her another way of life, and Paul Kvinta sets out in search of family on the Croatian coast, and ends up making friends of a lifetime.

I hope you enjoy all of these personal stories as much as we've enjoyed putting them together, and that they inspire you to travel and learn more about the beautiful world around us. 

MICHELLE HESPE





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The world in a flash

THROUGH THE EYES of Steve McCurry, a camera has telescopic powers. His pictures reflect the essence of the world's most elusive cultures. In the 1980s, disguised in native garb and armed with a bag of film, he delved deep into Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Along the way he captured the portrait of Sharbat Gula, a green-eyed refugee girl who became a global icon after appearing on a cover of *National Geographic*. In the decades since, McCurry has documented conflict zones such as Beirut and Tibet, and explored endless frontiers, from Italy to Myanmar and India. Here, he shares his angle on the nomadic life:



PHOTOGRAPHER



News & Reviews

ENDANGERED WILDLIFE • GLOBAL NEWS • MYSTERY • SPECULATION • OBSERVATION

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Numbering just 15 in the 1960s, giant tortoises found on the Galapagos island of Espanola have had their population boosted to around 1,000 following a successful breeding and reintroduction program. While population numbers have been restored to a point where the tortoises can sustain themselves, the next test is whether or not Espanola's ecosystem – which was largely ravaged by feral goats introduced in the 1800s – is still having adverse impacts on the longevity of the giant tortoises. While the goats were removed in the 1970s, their stripping of the island's undergrowth has transformed Espanola's naturally grassy ecosystem into one of big and woody vegetation. The effects of this on the reintroduced tortoises won't be fully known for another 20-30 years, with the ecological restoration potentially taking hundreds of years.





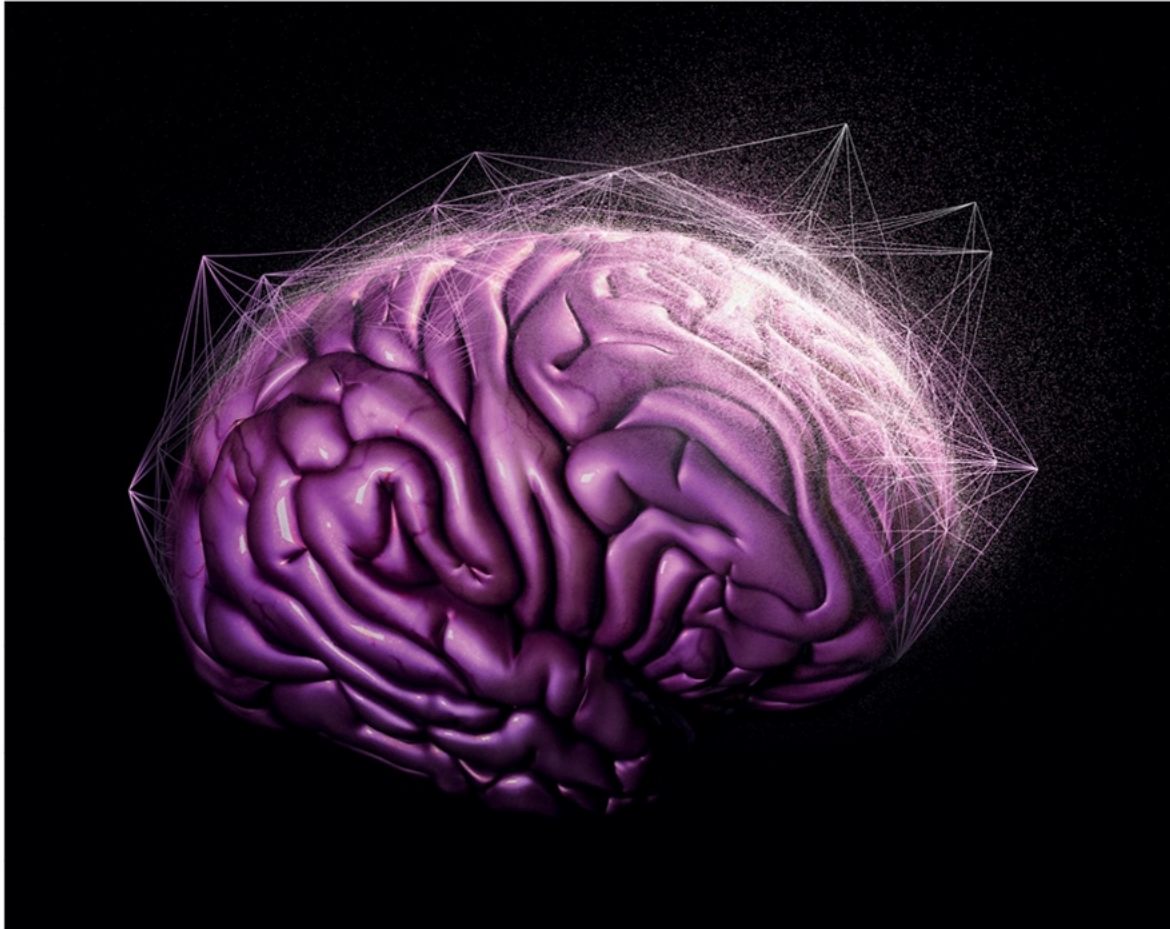
What lies beneath?

The subject of much speculation since the Middle Ages, Stonehenge still carries with it a throng of seemingly unanswerable questions: Who built it? What was its function? Where did the stones come from? In a collaborative project between the

University of Birmingham and Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, the 'Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project' may have brought us a step closer to understanding the context of this prehistoric monument. Over the past four years, a group of archaeologists have conducted a geophysical and remote sensing survey to construct a highly detailed digital map of the landscape beneath Stonehenge and its surrounds. Where Stonehenge was previously thought to be standing in isolation, the 3D map, which spans a mammoth 12 square km, has uncovered 17 additional ritual monuments about the same age as Stonehenge itself. Among the discoveries are two giant pits, appearing to astronomically align to dusk and dawn. Also discovered were practice trenches dug around Stonehenge in preparation for battle on the western front – particularly timely given the recent centenary of WWI.

OUR MISSION

We are committed to bringing you stories that matter, and ideas that can enlighten and possibly change your life. Come with us to explore the world through authentic travel experiences written by people who care about the planet and its people.



MEMORY ERASURE

It may have once been The inspiration for many a science-fiction novel or film, but memory erasure is no longer limited to that realm.



Scientists at UC Davis Centre For Neuroscience have conducted lab experiments that have successfully erased specific memories in mice.

Given mild electric shocks when placed in a cage, the mice were trained to develop a learned fear, which became apparent when they would fearfully freeze in response to being placed in the cage. Utilising a technique that manipulates nerve cells with light, the neuroscientists at UC Davis followed the exact nerve cells in the mice's brains that were activated in learning and memory retrieval.

After localising the specific nerve cells, the scientists were able to switch them off using light through a fibre-optic cable, effectively eliminating the mice's memories of ever having been shocked.

This technology is a long way off being used on humans, but there are high hopes that it could help sufferers of highly traumatic events, and that the technology will evolve to stimulate cells in order to incite memories, potentially reversing memory loss.

Scientists were able to switch them off using light through a fibre-optic cable



FAST FACT



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The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

OUR FAVOURITE BRITISH RETIREES return with trademark charm and wit. Equanimity dissipates when two new guests, Guy and Lavinia, arrive at The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel for the Elderly and Beautiful, which has become so successful that there's only a single vacancy. It is a predicament for the new arrivals and a cause of bickering among the 'elderly and beautiful'. Meanwhile, Sonny is trying to overcome a predicament of his own – juggling his upcoming traditional Indian wedding with his expansionist desire to purchase a new property. This sequel sees director John Madden and writer Ol Parker pair up again to create a warm and uplifting film filled with comedy gems.

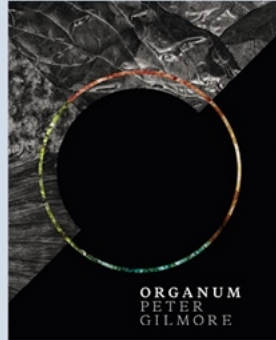


Betty White Goes Wild!

US actor, author and comedian Betty White has been in show business for over 70 years and she has always had a deep love for animals – making her the ideal spokeswoman for National Geographic's 'Cause an Uproar' big cat initiative. Now, in the documentary Betty Goes Wild, she takes viewers on a personal journey to get to know and understand endangered big cats by going behind the scenes at three of America's top zoos and safari parks.

Not surprisingly, it's both moving and hilarious.





Organum

The second book by award-winning Australian chef Peter Gilmore. *Organum*, not only explores what it means to have a unique Australian style of cooking, but also delves into the worlds of the many producers that make Gilmore's fine food at Quay restaurant possible. It pays homage to the next generation of emerging young chefs in Australia. murdochbooks.com.au



Coffee encounters

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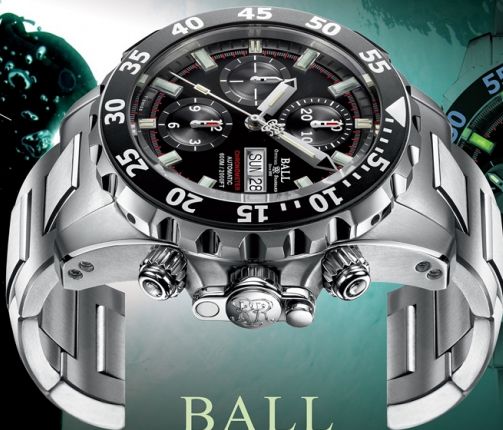
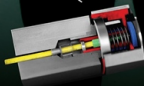
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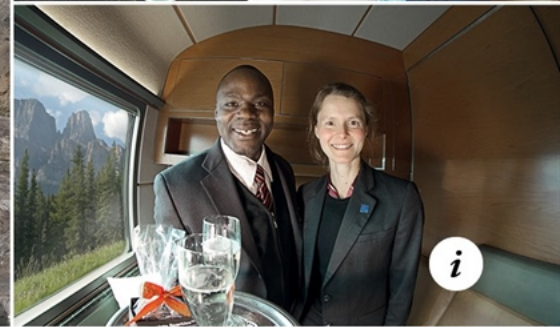


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The bare necessities

**MEET DANIEL FLYNN: LIFE-CHANGER, ENTREPRENEUR AND
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THANKYOU.** By RILEY PALMER

i

FOR MOST PEOPLE, childhood ingrained “thank you” into our vernacular, with the words tumbling out of our mouths more frequently than we can count. However, the sad irony is, that for all the things for which we articulate “thank you”, the fundamental necessities – clean water, adequate food and basic hygiene – are rarely among them.

In his first year of a Bachelor of Project Management in Construction, co-founder and now managing director of Thankyou, Daniel Flynn, realised millions of people the world over don’t have these necessities.

“I was researching for an assignment and discovered that 900 million people didn’t have access to safe water at that time,” he says. “Not only that, around 450,000 people die every day of waterborne diseases.”



> VIDEO



This video requires an internet connection.





These figures prompted the 19-year-old and some of his friends to change the world, one bottle of water at a time.

Learning that Australians spend \$600 million annually on bottled water, the enterprising teens started up a bottled water company dedicated to funding safe-water projects in developing nations.

“But we needed start-up capital,” explains Flynn, “so we pitched the vision behind our idea to a factory that came on board, promising no up-front costs. Then, because they’d partnered with us and we had a bit of credibility, another factory donated 30,000 bottles and an unused bottle mould. From there, we got a distributor involved.”



A social enterprise, Thankyou supports projects by already- established charities, operating on what is known as a “project-based model”, Flynn explains,

“We receive project proposals from various charities, and if the project meets our criteria we fund it.” Some of the high-profile organisations Thankyou works with include Oxfam, Red Cross and World Vision.

Now one of Australia’s most successful social enterprises, Thankyou has diversified its product range to include food and body care products – the ethos of the product range stemming from world health needs.

“There’s a need to fund water, food and health programs,” says Flynn, “so we want our products to relate to these.”

Many people across the world have Flynn and his team to thank for helping them out of dire circumstances or simply engaging our social conscience. When asked what he’s thankful for, Flynn says, “I am thankful that I get to wake up every day and work on something that is having an impact beyond me.”

For something we say so robotically, thank you can be a powerful statement. 



FAST FACTS





Australian style

CELEBRATED CHEF PETER GILMORE ASKS: DOES AUSTRALIA HAVE ITS OWN CUISINE, OR IS OUR NATIONAL CUISINE MORE ABOUT STYLE? By MICHELLE HESPE

CREDITS



These ON THE WAKE OF HIS SECOND BOOK, *Organum* being published, while on the brink of heading up the Sydney Opera House's famous restaurant, Bennelong, chef Peter Gilmore thinks about what it is to be an Australian chef.

"With my new book, I wanted to look more deeply into the philosophy of food and what makes me cook the way I do. I wanted to explore the idea of Australian food. Is there such a thing as Australian cuisine? I came to the conclusion through looking at my own work and where my



influences come from, that I don't think we will ever have a traditional, identifiable food that is based on recipes and ingredients," he says.

"I think when traditional cuisines such as French or Japanese were developed centuries ago, those countries were in relative isolation. They didn't have the communication or the availability of different ingredients that we have today. They had a small set of produce that they worked with, and they developed methods and traditions over centuries."

Gilmore's conclusion was that rather than having a national cuisine, what Australians have is a particular spirit of cooking. "It is something that can be recognised, and it has to do with the freedom of *not* having a traditional cuisine to pin your creations upon. You are not forced into a narrow ideal of what a national cuisine is. So that gives Australian chefs the freedom to explore and embrace our multicultural food traditions."

Like many Australians, Gilmore grew up eating Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Italian, French, Greek, Lebanese and so many other types of cuisines.

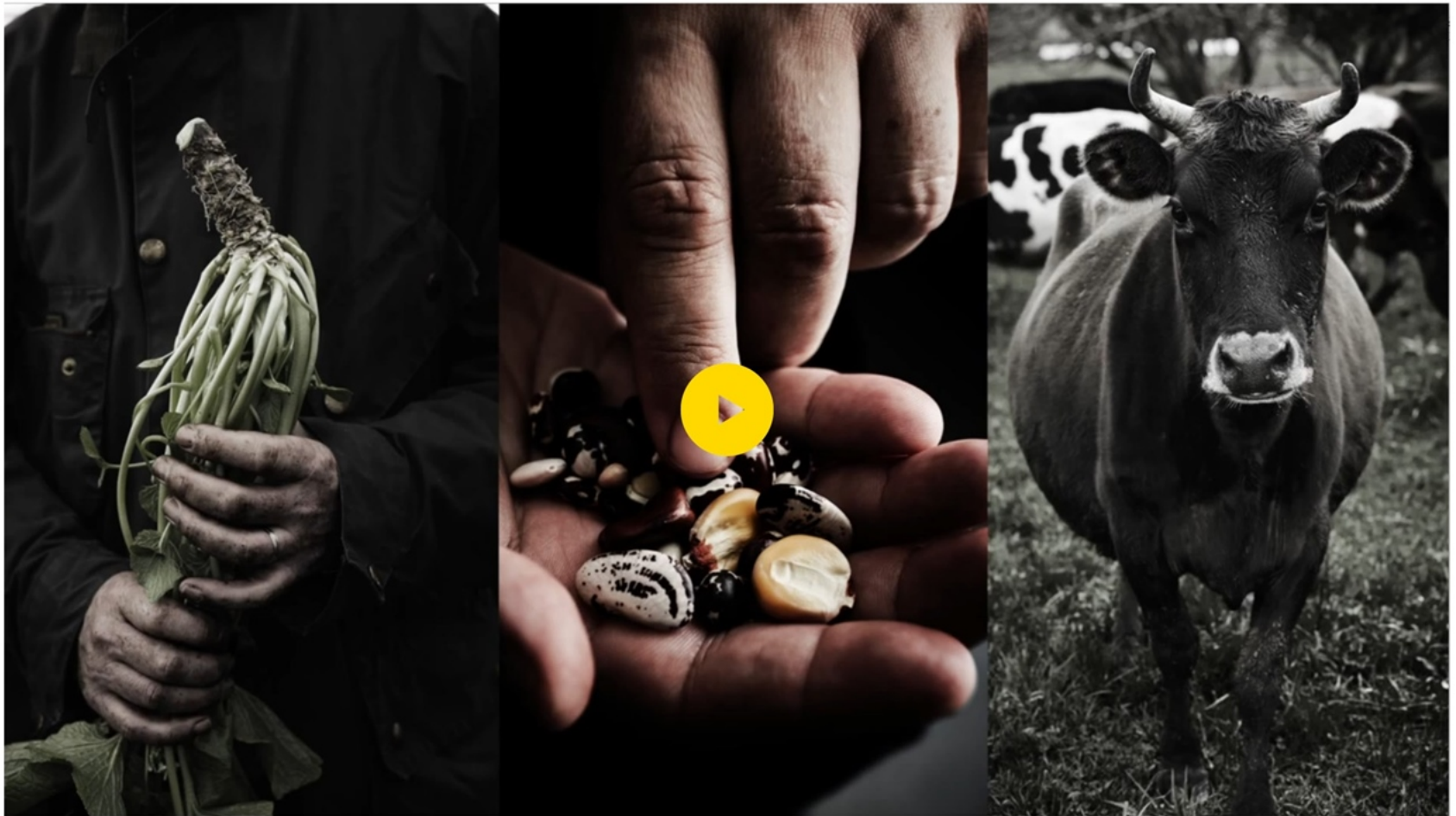
"I've always embraced a lot of those traditions, and then formed my own opinions and ideas about the flavours within them," he says. "That, combined with an openness to be able to express yourself, and the endless great quality of produce here, has given chefs in Australia a great sense of creativity and freedom that doesn't necessarily exist everywhere. I think that spirit, and the spirit that we have of friendliness and the casual nature that we can bring to the table – alongside professionalism – is quite identifiable as an Australian style. So we have a certain style rather than a set type of cuisine, and I think every chef working in Australia will interpret what it means to create Australian style in their own way." □



FAST FACTS



> VIDEO



CHEF TALK (0:43)

Peter Gilmore & his relationship with producers





Swimming with whales

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SAND ISLAND WILL ALWAYS BE A MAJOR DRAWCARD FOR AUSTRALIA, BUT WHALES ARE STEALING THE SHOW NEAR FRASER ISLAND. By MICHELLE HESPE



FOR MANY DECADES, FRASER ISLAND'S MAIN ATTRACTION has been its 123km-long stretch of white-sanded beach. It is globally renowned not just because it is the world's largest sand island but also because the beach is a highway you can take on in a 4WD – wind in your hair, with the beach on one side and thick bushland on the other.

Fast-forward to 2015 and it appears that some gentle giants of the sea – humpback whales – are stealing the thunder from Fraser Island's bucket-list beach-cruising experience.

Skipper Brian Perry is an old hand at whale-watching, having pioneered the exhilarating



experience from Queensland's Hervey Bay in the late 1980s.

In August 2014, he upped the ante, introducing whale-watching boat trips where guests can slip into the water and swim with humpbacks that use the Great Sandy Strait as a passage during their migration to Antarctica from July to October.



Hervey Bay Whale Watch operators are working with Queensland Parks and Wildlife to ensure the experience is safe and respectful for humpbacks and humans. Conditions aren't always ideal for swimming with creatures so large they can unwittingly kill a person with a flick of their tail, so the swims are under extremely controlled conditions and the heavens need to be aligned for the go-ahead. Waters have to be calm, good visibility is needed, and the whales (which are incredibly curious) also have to be in a relaxed



FAST FACT

state. If they are breaching and tail slapping, diving with them can be dangerous.

Some of the lucky people who recently took a dip with humpbacks said that they were so close they could make eye contact with them, see remora fish feeding on their skin, and pick out the minute details of their many barnacles.

"You can't pre-package nature – it doesn't work to a human timetable – but we were curious and excited to see how they'd interact with us," said Hervey Bay pharmacist and seasoned scuba diver Darren Nicholls. "They swam side on and gazed at us straight in the eye. It's not like birdwatching; they actually wanted to come up and say hello to us," he said. □





Wildlife Warriors

EMBODYING THE ETHOS OF STEVE IRWIN, AUSTRALIA ZOO WILDLIFE WARRIORS ARE ON A MISSION TO PROTECT THE WORLD'S THREATENED SPECIES. *By* RILEY PALMER



ESTABLISHED IN 2002 BY STEVE AND TERRI IRWIN, Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors is on the frontline when it comes to wildlife conservation. Helping to protect endangered species and preserve their natural ecosystems, Wildlife Warriors (WW) gives a fighting chance to some of the most vulnerable creatures in the world.

WW Director of Development, Cynthia Thompson, is a warrior and an animal activist. "One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is communicating with people who are passionate and



motivated to raise awareness and funds,” she says. “It’s so inspiring to hear the joy in their voice or see the sparkle in their eye when they start to imagine what they can accomplish.”

Luxury coach tour company AAT Kings employs a team of these inspired individuals, many of whom have involved themselves in sustainability projects such as knitting sweaters for the little penguins on Phillip Island. “If we are going to promote Australia and New Zealand to the world, and share our amazing destinations with our guests, we need to give back,” says Global Managing Director of AAT Kings, Anthony Hayes. “And from my perspective that means we should also be part of the process to protect our wildlife.”



FAST FACT

Providing WW’s main project – the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital – with a donation of \$48,000 over the course of two years, AAT Kings are primarily supporting the rehabilitation of the iconic koala, an animal Cynthia describes as the hospital’s “most specialised patients”. After seeing first-hand some of the injuries koalas endure from dogs, cars and environmental degradation, Anthony says, “It’s a nice feeling to know we are doing something to make a difference.”

While corporate philanthropy is certainly a step in the right direction, Cynthia suggests we all need to take responsibility for our footprint on this earth. “When it comes to habitat conservation and wildlife protection, is not just about what we actively do; it is also what we choose not to do that makes a difference,” she says. “The work being carried out in the field by anti-poaching patrols, vets and conservation units is vital in defending the future of threatened species. But the truth is that without the support of responsible consumers making conscious decisions, those in the field are fighting a battle that may prove impossible to win.”





THE ART OF THE CAMOUFLAGE TRAVELLER

By FIONA HUNT  @AW_FIONA Managing Director, Adventure World

“THANKS VERY MUCH,” I said as I passed my cash across the counter of a non-descript gas station somewhere in Nevada. The attendant looked up.

“That’s a mighty pretty accent you got there miss. Where’re you from then? Texas?”

“Ahh, no, a little further south,” I replied with a smile.

This was not an isolated incident. Over years of travel, my flat, non-traceable accent is often remarked upon, and I’ve realised it’s actually a case of mimicry on my part – I unknowingly



mimic whatever accent I am listening to. I also sometimes mimic body language and posture of those around me.

Embarassing perhaps, but I've learned not to just live with my habit but to embrace it, as the delight of being a camouflage traveller has sunk in.

Now I love it when someone speaks to me in French so fast that I am completely lost, because they think I am a native speaker. I chalk up as a small victory when a street hawker in a busy tourist town doesn't approach me to buy their wares. To walk down a street and not be classified by my clothes or demeanour is a dream. These are all small triumphs that define becoming camouflaged into local communities.

I have found that the key to camouflage is quietness and observation. Learn to not project yourself, your expectations or demands, but instead sit back and let your surroundings sweep you up in them. By blending in with the local community we gain the insights into our surroundings, allowing us to notice the subtleties of language, the lilt in a voice, the glance of an eye, the tilt of a head and other subtle nuances of daily transactions. Through stillness we get an intimate view of the culture, the people and the insights they have to share.

Remember that the camouflage traveller is not about not being yourself, but rather about not being anything at all; it's about being a neutral canvas. Let your surroundings be your guide, as in quiet and observation we often not only find truth in others, but also within ourselves.

FIONA HUNT





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A full-page background image showing a scuba diver in a blue and black wetsuit, mask, and regulator, swimming next to a large sea turtle. The diver is holding a camera. They are in clear blue water near a rocky reef. The title 'DEEP BLUE QUEST' is overlaid in large white serif font.

DEEP BLUE QUEST

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER ENRIC SALA SPEAKS ABOUT
HIS LIFE- AND SEA-CHANGING PROJECT, PRISTINE SEAS.

by MICHELLE HESPE

> VIDEO



PRISTINE SEAS (0:55)

Footage courtesy of National Geographic's Pristine Seas project.



IT TAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY PERSON TO DEDICATE THEIR LIFE'S WORK TO PROTECTING SOMETHING SO VAST

that most of us can't even comprehend the effect it has on our day-to-day lives, let alone the lives of future generations. But some people have it in their bones – a connection to the earth and everything on it.

Enric Sala is one of those people. Since he was a young child, he revelled in the adventures of the legendary French naval officer, explorer, writer and innovator, Jacques Cousteau.

“Growing up, I always wanted to be a diver on his boat and to be a part of his incredible adventures,” Sala says down the phone line from his office at National Geographic’s headquarters in Washington DC.

There is no doubt that he has now achieved that childhood dream. Decades later, armed with a passion and hunger for knowledge equal to Cousteau’s, Sala is a part of the great man’s legacy, having established himself as an explorer at National Geographic and as the founder of the Pristine Seas Project.



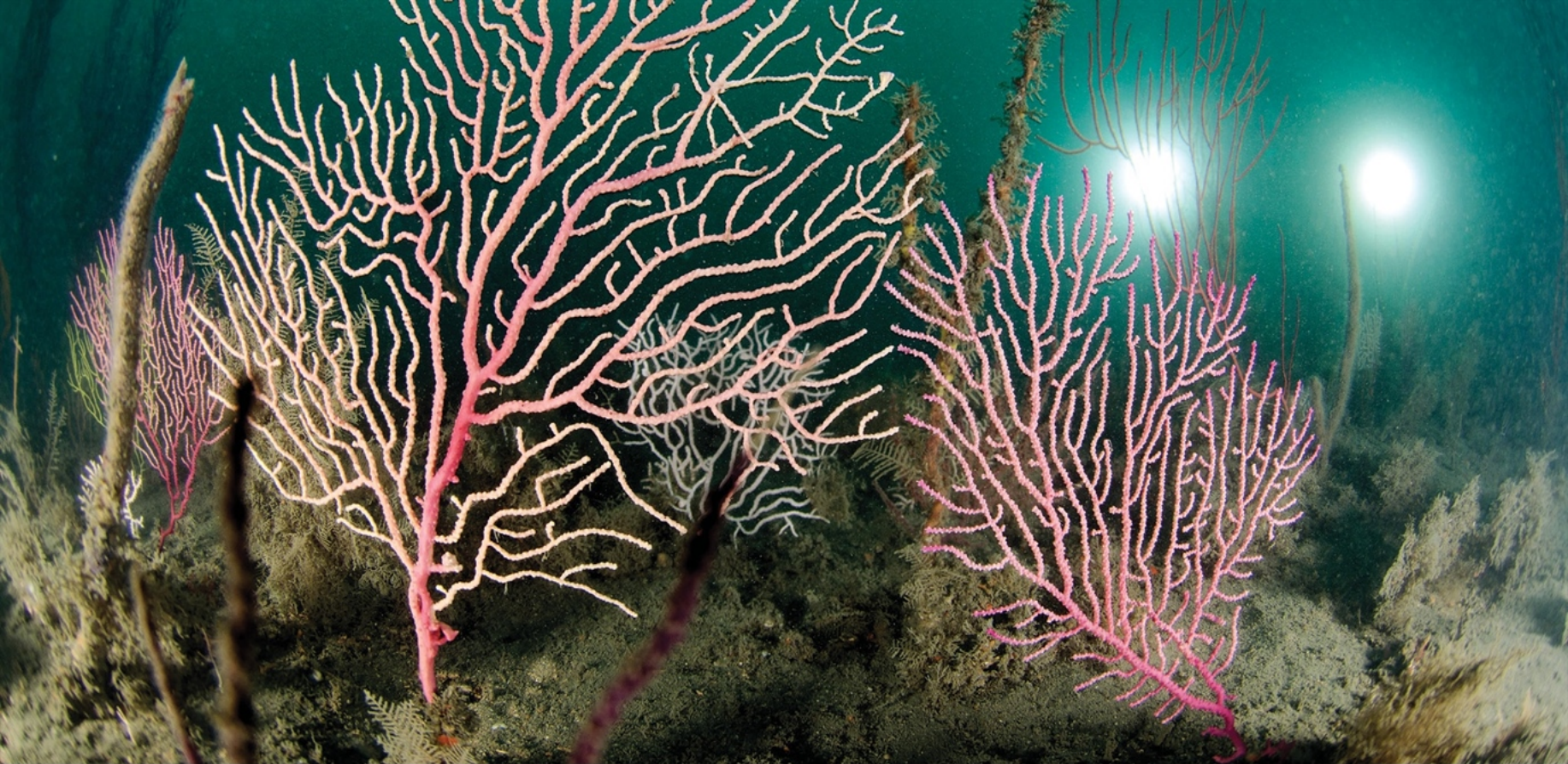
Sala first realised that the ocean would figure largely in his professional life when he was studying marine biology. Years later, he was swimming in a marine reserve off the Medes Islands in Spain and it truly clicked.

“I saw it. I saw what Jacques Cousteau would have seen – so many animals and such diverse marine life. So many fish, so many sharks, and other creatures everywhere. All of the animals that Cousteau showed us in the 1950s were right there in front of me. It was amazing! It is still very easy to see this kind of life now in the protected marine environments of the world – you can just snorkel and be there among it all.”

Pristine Seas is a monumental project aiming to inspire governments of the world to fully protect and create marine reserves in 20 new pristine locations worldwide. However, Sala is modest when it comes to the achievement of his goals.

“We don’t want to appear presumptuous – we want to be sensitive about this, so that we are welcomed by the governments of the world,” he says. “But achieving this ambitious goal will help protect the natural heritage of many of the world’s most pristine seas. Through National Geographic’s unique assets, we can build coalitions that will help create and sustain these pristine seas for generations to come.”





Overall, that means Sala's Pristine Seas Project is aiming to work with partner NGOs and key leaders to support the global goal of protecting 10 percent of the ocean by 2020.

Since 2009, Sala has directed expeditions to 12 of the most unspoilt areas of the ocean. Merging exploration, scientific research, economic analysis and strategic communications, his project has inspired country leaders to protect a total area of more than 1.4 million square kilometres in Costa Rica, Chile, Gabon, Kiribati, and the United States.





This is only a small portion of what is to come in the next five years, as news of Sala's project is spreading fast. In September 2014, it was announced at the Clinton Global Initiative that there would be an expanded commitment to the project. The Initiative brings thought leaders together and asks that each member make one commitment. "It could be anything," says Sala. "So we made the commitment to protect approximately 20 new worldwide locations as fully protected marine reserves over a total of more than 1.5 million square kilometres. But I hope, that after five years, twice that amount of the ocean will be protected."

Looking back over the past decade, Sala has come a long way. After all, it was only five years ago that he had been working at an American university teaching students about humans' impact on the oceans. "One day I realised that I was writing the obituary of the ocean," he says. "I felt like I was the doctor and that the ocean was a sick person – I had to tell them that they were going to die after a long and excruciating death. I had to change that, before it was too late, so I went to National Geographic with my Pristine Seas idea and they loved it. I knew it was the beginning of something bigger than me."





BEST SHOT COMPETITION

CHASING SUMMER: WINNER

"Chasing summer to me is about savouring the warm afternoon sun and embracing the new. There's no end to the adventures we can have if we seek them with our eyes wide open."

- Michael Chan



< scroll >



BEST SHOT COMPETITION

CHASING SUMMER: EDITOR'S PICKS

TAP TO ZOOM



COLIN OLIVE



MARK DAFHEY



GARRY MORTON



MICHAEL BAYNES



REMY GEREKA



DAVID LEE

[VIEW ALL ENTRIES](#) >

British Columbian BEAUTIES

Mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers and beaches – this region boasts them all in breathtaking abundance. The spectacular setting also provides an adventurer's playground for a staggering array of outdoor activities, and it's bursting with farm-fresh produce and refined local wines.





VICTORIA

The city of Victoria in Canada is an urban hub that is also close to nature. Whether it's relaxing rejuvenation that you're after, cultural vibrancy or pure adventure and excitement – there is no shortage of options to satisfy every craving. From international icons like The Butchart Gardens, to hidden gems like Canada's oldest Chinatown, your days in Victoria can be as busy or as relaxed as you want them to be.

The vibe of Victoria is unlike anywhere else in Canada. Steeped in rich colonial British history with many original buildings dating back to the 1880s, Victoria has an incomparable mix of old-world charm and trendy new-world experiences. Heritage architecture, colourful gardens and traditions like afternoon tea meet a plethora of outdoor adventure, world-class culinary experiences and a vibrant arts and culture scene. Combine all of this with the wild beauty of the Pacific Ocean and old-growth rainforests set against a backdrop of the Olympic Mountains, and Victoria is the perfect getaway and an ideal starting point for Vancouver Island adventures.

Victoria isn't just a happening hub during the daylight hours however, as at night the city comes alive with exciting arts and entertainment. Bastions of traditional British pub culture sit side-by-side with polished craft cocktail bars and fine restaurants to create a vibrant nightlife.





WHISTLER

Just a couple of hours' north of Vancouver by car, or a short but memorable floatplane ride or ferry journey from Victoria, Whistler is consistently ranked as the number one mountain resort in North America.

Set against the dramatic mountains of the Coast Range and anchored by a pedestrian-only village with cobblestone streets, Whistler has a rapidly evolving cultural scene rich in original festivals, events and award-winning museums. Whistler caters to those with a sense of adventure and is also the kind of place that welcomes those with an appreciation for the finer things in life. There is no shortage of fine-dining establishments, cafes and bars that are as stylish as they are friendly and welcoming.

When summer arrives, Whistler attracts droves of people, and its two side-by-side mountains are spanned by the world-record-breaking PEAK 2 PEAK Gondola.

This tri-cable gondola spans 4.4 kilometres and offers direct access to Whistler Blackcomb's renowned alpine terrain, which is filled with wildflowers and home to black bears, rugged



RETURN TO TOP

ADVERTISING FEATURE



volcanic peaks, mountaintop restaurants and kilometres of hiking and mountain biking trails. Add to this the many stunning lakes, perfect golf greens and ancient forests, and you have a playground that guarantees fun, adventure and relaxation.

A steady stream of accolades and number one rankings are proof of Whistler's enduring global appeal and competitive edge, but those who've spent time at the all-season mountain resort say that its real staying power is in the way the place hooks you in, drawing people back year after year.

Fair warning: Whistler is a hard place to leave. But that's okay, as the welcome mat is always laid out.



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Whether you are looking for the best of American ski holidays, or planning a summer vacation in the Rockies, start by exploring The Mile High City.



Union Station by Scott Dressel-Martin

DENVER
FOOD, DRINK
& FUN



Bryce Boyer

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Red Rocks by Stevie Crecelius

DENVER
MUSIC, ARTS
& CULTURE



Ron Ruhoff

DENVER
HIGH COUNTRY
ADVENTURES



Georgetown Loop Railroad by Rich Grant

The Rockies, combined with 300 days of sunshine, will inspire you to try new things – hiking amidst mountain lakes and majestic peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park, jeep tours in historic mining towns, a scenic drive to see the golden fall colors of the aspen forests, or snowshoe trekking in Winter Park.



Rich Grant



USA Pro Challenge by Stevie Crecelius

DENVER
SPORTS
TOWN USA



Colorado Rockies



Bryce Boyer

With seven professional sports teams, annual events like the USA Pro Challenge cycling race and the B-cycle citywide bike-sharing program, Denver is a year-round sports lover's paradise.



Blue Bear by Scott Dressel-Martin



Denver Art Museum by Scott Dressel-Martin



Clyfford Still Museum by Ted Steadman

Find bold art, inside and out – from the Denver Art Museum hosting *Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century* through March 15, 2015, to public art like the lovable "blue bear" and creative neighborhoods filled with dozens of art galleries. And, no music lover's bucket list is complete without seeing a concert under the stars at the world-famous Red Rocks Amphitheatre.



Museum of Contemporary Art by Stevie Crecelius

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WONDERFUL WORLD

WE ROUND UP 50 FABULOUS WAYS TO GET ACTIVE,
EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE THE PLANET'S FINEST IN 2015.

by BRIAN JOHNSTON

1

Go tribal in Sapa

VIETNAM

The cool-climate allure of French colonial towns is getting a new lease of life as visitors look to the mountains of Vietnam for inspiration. Sapa is a market town, a centre for the Hmong and Dao people, and a base for eco-treks in the surrounding highlands.



CREDITS



2

Hike Torres del Paine**CHILE**

Patagonia is a legendary land of fierce winds, rugged mountains and beech forests. Its highlight – and South America's most outstanding national park – is Torres del Paine, where spectacular granite mountains rear, glaciers tumble and lakes shimmer. Take your wet-weather gear, as the only drawback is the entirely unpredictable weather.

3 **Volunteer in Cape Town****SOUTH AFRICA**

A heart-warming way to move beyond sightseeing: immerse yourself in local life and provide help to an impoverished community by teaching in Cape Town.

4 **Sleep in an igloo****SWITZERLAND**

Ice hotels are so yesterday. Strap on your snowshoes and head instead to an igloo in the Engelberg-Titlis igloo village for a night inside a cosy sheepskin bed.

5 **Stampede in Calgary****CANADA**

July's Calgary Stampede is one of the world's largest outdoor rodeo competitions. Roping calves, riding broncos and wrestling steers are top attractions, along with the hurtling Chuckwagon Race. But the Stampede has much more: agricultural competitions, livestock shows, concerts and amusement rides, and creates a great city buzz.

6

4WD in the
Atacama Desert



7 Seek happiness in Bhutan

The Himalayan kingdom renowned for calculating Gross National Happiness treads a perilous path between traditional Buddhist beliefs and modern development and aims at low-volume, high-quality tourism. The rhododendron-popping mountain landscapes are gorgeous, the monasteries rich in colour, and dance festivals and traditional pastimes abound. Don't worry, be happy.

CREDITS

8. HORSE AROUND IN MONTANA, USA

Retreat to a working ranch in Montana and enjoy the great outdoors while learning to be a cowboy or cowgirl. Sort and pen calves, go on cattle drives with ranch hands, or ride through glorious Rocky Mountains scenery.



9. MAKE A PILGRIMAGE TO GALLIPOLI, TURKEY

Even if you can't get there for the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landings at Gallipoli on April 25, you can pay your respects at any time of the year.

10. TAKE A TOUR, CAMBODIA

Cambodia is the next Vietnam, on the cusp of rapid development and looking to tourism. Beyond the famous temples at Angkor you might soon be hearing about beach life at Sihanoukville, the floating villages of Tonlé Sap Lake and the tigers of Bokor National Park.

11. SIP SANTIAGO WINE, CHILE

Slip out of Santiago and into patchwork-field country that produces notable Chilean wines. Linger at a cellar door for a sip of Carmenere, the country's signature grape variety found almost nowhere else.

12

**Get nostalgic
in Havana****CUBA**

It may be a cliché to say you should go before it all changes, and for the Cubans we hope it does. In the meantime, soak up the sight of vintage cars, colonial-era villas, rum bars and old-world cigar factories, and be utterly seduced.

**13. TRAVEL UP THE MEKONG
RIVER, VIETNAM**

The coast is now well-tramped, but Vietnam's sprawling Mekong Delta provides another world of sun-baked temples, French colonial towns and street markets filled with shimmering fish. Flat roads make for great cycling and the river itself is afloat with suave cruise ships.

**14. SAIL TO THE GALAPAGOS
ISLANDS, ECUADOR**

The amazing thing about the Galapagos is the intimacy of its wildlife experiences. Get close enough to iguanas to hear them chomping seaweed, photograph blue-footed boobies and if a gull lands on your head, don't be surprised.

15

Boat below
Iguazú Falls





16

Meet gorillas

UGANDA

Half the world's critically endangered mountain gorillas live in the bamboo forests of the Virunga Mountains. Head off with a tracker and come face-to-face with a family of gorillas in the wild for true moments of humidity-soaked, heart-pounding animal magic.

17. ICE WALK IN JOHNSTON CANYON, CANADA

Thirty minutes outside Banff in the Rockies, this canyon provides a winter adventure for almost anyone. Walk along chilly steel catwalks and across icy creek beds and look out for moose and wolves. Adrenaline lovers can tackle an ice climb.

18. GET ADVENTUROUS IN PETRA, JORDAN

Who doesn't want to find their inner Indiana Jones? The ancient city of the still-mysterious Nabataean traders, Petra has all the elements of a rollicking archaeological adventure: camel rides, hikes to hidden crusader castles, eerie cliff tombs and spectacular ruins among the desert sands.

19. HOT-AIR BALLOON OVER THE NGORONGORO CRATER, TANZANIA

Towering cliffs, wide grasslands and flamingo-haunted soda lakes are reasons to visit the Ngorongoro Crater. Take an early-morning balloon ride and drift above a landscape dotted with lumbering elephants and herds of wildebeest.

20. CLIMB MT KINABALU, MALAYSIA

Sabah has quite the reputation for adventure sports, and experienced hikers can take on 4095-metre Mt Kinabalu, an overnight trek that starts through orchid- and rhododendron-studded forest and finishes in snow at the summit. The final haul is made in the dark, and then a spectacular sunrise awaits.

21^{TO} 24

21. REDISCOVER CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

The earthquakes of 2010–2011 left Christchurch badly damaged, but the vibrant city has embraced the road to recovery with its spirit intact. Enjoy lively pop-up bars, a great theatre scene, temporary shops inside shipping containers and restaurants almost back to pre-earthquake concentration in this city in transition.

22. CLIMB MOUNT STRÓMBOLI, ITALY

This smouldering volcano sits on its own island off the Sicilian coast. The intimidating mountain of black rock has been erupting continuously for 2000 years. Climb to the summit in late afternoon to be rewarded with a sunset over the sea and fireworks of lava.

23. MEET THE BUDDHAS IN YUNGANG, CHINA

At Yungang in China's northern Shanxi Province, a kilometre-long stretch of cliffs has been carved with 50,000 sculptures of dragons, flying angels and holy men dating back 1,500 years. The highlights are fabulous giant Buddhas with elephant-sized ears and serene smiles.

24. PARTY IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

If we're to pick a single festival, it would have to be Rio's pre-Lent Carnival, surely the brashest, biggest, most bootylicious and bling-draped festival of all. Streets erupt in merrymaking, drums beat and sequins glitter; the Passarela do Samba parade is the culminating event.





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50 TRAVEL TRENDS

25

Dune bash
in Dubai





26^{TO} 29

26. EAT YOUR WAY AROUND MYANMAR

For the past few years, Myanmar has been the new Asian destination of the moment. Now it's time to discover fresh and often fruity Burmese food, from street noodles to rich curries and the odd joys of fermented tealeaf salad to Shan-inspired papaya salad.

27. HEAD TO A PARIS BEACH, FRANCE

Yes, you can sunbathe and build sandcastles right in the heart of downtown Paris, with views over the Seine River and Nôtre Dame cathedral. The three-kilometre artificial sands of Paris Plage appear every summer, complete with potted palms, deck chairs and cooling water spouts.

28. ROLLERCOAST IN ABU DHABI, UAE

The Formula Rossa rollercoaster at Ferrari World is the world's fastest. It flies crazily around sharp double bends inspired by famous racetracks, reaching 240kph and a force of 4.8G, giving you some sense of how it must feel to drive a Formula 1 car.

29. SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP IN ESFAHAN, IRAN

Plunge into the shadowy world of Bazar-e Bozorg, where dome-topped passageways, some dating back a millennium, run for 1.7 kilometres. Dusty carpet shops, jewellery winks and businessmen at desks crunching nuts while bakers flip huge rounds of flatbread.



Explore
pyramids

MEXICO

From the city
of Monte Albán in the hills of
Oaxaca, to

30

Explore pyramids

MEXICO

From the city of Monte Albán in the hills of Oaxaca, to the tombs of ancient kings at Palenque or the temple at Chichén Itzá rising from the Yucatán plains, Mayan pyramids are fascinating.

31. SAIL THE DRAKE PASSAGE, ANTARCTICA

This stormy crossing will test your seamanship (hello seasickness) but it's well worth it when you arrive in Antarctica. Spellbinding penguin encounters and landscapes of frozen, elemental grandeur. Get going now before the icebergs melt.



32. FIND PEACE IN KERALA, INDIA

India's spice-laden Kerala has the latest in retreats for body and soul. Meditation camps and yoga classes all offer inspiration and, if that doesn't provide a glimpse of nirvana, a traditional massage might enhance your sense of serenity.



33

Explore Ethiopia





34

Go wild in the Okavango Delta

BOTSWANA

Zebras, buffalos, leopards, elephants, hippos galore. Camping is rugged, but luxury lodges provide crisp linen and butler service, too.

35. GO SAILING ON THE YANGTZE RIVER, CHINA

Follow in the wake of artists and poets who've been inspired for centuries by the dramatic beauty of the Three Gorges between Wuhan and Chongqing. Beautiful.

36. FLY-FISH IN WYOMING, USA

Blue-ribbon streams and thousands of crystalline lakes provide great trout fishing; local companies offer guided fishing tours and equipment.

38. SCUBA-DIVE IN THE ALPS, FRANCE

Exchange ski gear for wetsuit in Tignes and plunge into an ice hole in an alpine lake for a remarkable experience.

39. ENJOY JAZZ IN DETROIT, USA

Detroit absolutely bursts with jazz clubs, and September's free Jazz festival is the USA's largest.

40. LAP IT UP IN CZECH, CZECH REPUBLIC

Pilsen is the European Capital of Culture for 2015. The new year here sees in 50 cultural events, weekend parties, concerts and endless theatre.

41. DINE ON FRENCH FOOD, JAPAN

Tokyo bags more Michelin stars than any other city in the world. What's more, it's a fine place to go French with a fantastic array of top chefs in town.

42

Enjoy the great outdoors





43

Visit Indians in South & North Dakota

Throughout summer, Powwows are held across these US states, featuring ancient dancing, drumming and pageantry. Visit the many reservations as well.

44. WALK WITH KRUGER RHINOS, SOUTH AFRICA

Get an adrenaline hit on a walking safari that sees you tracking rhinos in private wilderness reserves near Kruger National Park. Common sense suggests you'll be okay – aren't there armed guards? – but instinct warns of lions. Wonderful and absolutely terrifying.

45. SWIM WITH SEA LIONS OFF THE EYRE PENINSULA, AUSTRALIA

Forget caged shark dives and enjoy a more friendly encounter in chilly South Australian waters.

46. SKI IN YABULI, CHINA

China has 70-odd ski fields. Yabuli in northeast China is the biggest and best, with all the trappings of an international ski resort.

47. SKI THE WHITE RING, AUSTRIA

In just one day you can ski 22 kilometres of superbly groomed runs and 5500 metres of descent – never taking the same lift.

48. RECONSIDER CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Sleek hotels, highly-regarded restaurants, a happening foreshore and a thriving art scene are making the Australian capital cool.

49

Admire a Santorini sunset





RETURN TO TOP

50 TRAVEL TRENDS

50

See the
Northern Lights





48 HOURS

I N B U E N O S A I R E S

THE ARGENTINE CAPITAL PROVIDES A FEAST OF CULTURE AND
ENTERTAINMENT – JUST DON'T EXPECT TO GET TO BED EARLY.

by BEN GROUNDWATER





DAY ONE

10am The day begins as any Porteño would like it to: with *medialunas* and a *café cortado*. These Buenos Aires breakfast staples – *medialunas*, or 'half moons', are sticky, sweet little croissants, while *café cortado* is an espresso with a dash of milk – are best enjoyed at a sidewalk café in the arty suburb of Palermo Soho. This is people-watching central: view BA's fashionistas while devouring a morning meal.

11am It appears in every tourist guidebook you're likely to find, but Recoleta Cemetery is famous for a reason. This necropolis is an amazing warren of richly decorated tombs housing the remains of some of Argentina's most famous and wealthy citizens. To find the resting place of the country's favourite daughter, Eva Peron, simply follow the crowds.

1pm With its strong history of immigration from Italy, is it any wonder Buenos Aires is so obsessed with pizza? El Cuartito (Talcahuano 937, Recoleta), a bustling neighbourhood joint in Recoleta, has been dishing up Argentine-style slices since 1934. With its walls lined with football memorabilia and its tables packed with brash local clientele, lunch doesn't get much more authentic.



DAY TWO

11am After a sleep-in, it's time to go shopping. And Buenos Aires knows how to do shopping. The streets of Palermo are lined with designer clothing stores, boutique homewares shops, antique stores and many purveyors of ridiculously on-trend bric-a-brac. Across in Villa Crespo, check out the outlet stores for labels such as Lacoste, Penguin and Converse.

1pm Rest those weary legs with lunch at one of *Porteños* best eateries, Lo de Jesus (lodejesus.com.ar). Buenos Aires is justifiably famous for its steaks, and this is the place to order one – a little 400g 'ojo de bife' steak with fried potatoes on the side should keep you going for the afternoon.

4pm There are a few obsessions that almost all *Porteños* share: food, fashion and football. The absolute best place to experience the latter is at La Bombonera, the home of the Boca Juniors sporting club and, many would say, the spiritual home of football in Argentina. If you're in town when the team is playing, prepare yourself for one of the loudest, most fanatical sporting experiences in the world.



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THE SECRET SIERRA

THE SIERRA MADRE ORIENTAL OF PUEBLA,
MEXICO, PRESENTS AN ENLIGHTENING
JOURNEY FOR A WRITER SEEKING HIS ROOTS.

words by JUAN MANUEL GOMEZ
photography by ALFREDO MARTINEZ





I was drawn to the Sierra Madre Oriental in the state of Puebla to answer the call of my family tree and to learn more about Mexican history. I began my journey among the landscapes and natural attractions of the northern region – the area surrounding Zacatlán de las Manzanas, the valley of Piedras Encimadas and Chignahuapan.

DISCONCERTING MAGIC

Chignahuapan is a fascinating town at the base of the majestic cliffs of the Sierra Madre Oriental. The town's name translates as 'between nine waters', because it is home to nine hot springs, which maintain a temperature of 50°C. One such spring, Salto de Quetzalapa, is a remarkable cascade of sulfurous waters over 90 metres tall that can also be appreciated from the ground at the eco-tourist park of Tulumán.



DID YOU
KNOW?





MAP

Once I have passed through a dwarfish, square-shaped arch into town, local iconography makes its presence known. Welcoming my arrival in Chignahuapan is the sculpture of a Christmas ball measuring 1.2 metres in diameter, which, like everything else here, has a logical explanation: for more than half a century, the town has been Mexico's largest producer of Christmas balls. The prized blown-glass spheres are lovingly decorated by 3000 local artisans who use a variety of clever specialist techniques.

In the town's main square, with its rows of lovely gallery arches, I stop to admire a small, multicoloured gazebo in Mudejar style, with indigenous motifs complementing the curious parish of Santiago the Apostle, which dates back to the 16th century.

Half-hidden in one of the planters on the square is a statue of Gaspar Henaine, the famous Mexican comic actor, better known as 'Capulina'. The city's prodigal son has been immortalised in bronze in one of his typical guffaws. There is also the church 'of the little mushroom' – where a tiny petrified fungus that apparently bears the imprint of Christ on the cross can be viewed through a magnifying glass.





Another interesting effigy that can be found inside the basilica of the Immaculate Conception is a 13-metre tall Virgin Mary sculpted from wood by Puebla artist José Luis Silva. This monumental sculpture is known locally as the 'Virgin Barbie', which leaves no mistaking what people really think of it.

As I walk down the streets flanked with broad, freshly painted porticoes, I consider the curiosities of Chignahuapan. But then hunger distracts me and draws me into a local bakery called El Globito. There I buy a baked apple filled with apple butter, nuts and raisins, completely covered in sweetened puff pastry. It is, fittingly, sinfully delicious.

GIFTS FROM GOD

Further into Puebla, residents have mythologised the geological phenomenon that resulted in the Valley of the Stacked Stones. Legend has it that giants arranged monumental rocks into capricious towers, achieving unbelievable forms of equilibrium.

If you are more evolution-focused, then you might prefer the theory that the Stacked Stones were formed 60 million years ago during the Tertiary Era, as a result of volcanic activity, chemical reactions and atmospheric agents such as rain, wind, ice and humidity.

The locals offer tours where they point out shapes that they have gleaned from the rocks and remind you that the stones cannot be climbed, or you can safely explore it alone without getting lost, making up your own mind about the shapes found within. The valley is open from 9am until 6pm, although a permit at the entrance booth allows you to camp overnight.

MYSTERIES AND MOUNTAIN PASSES

The Franciscan ex-convent of San Pedro and San Pablo in Zacatlán de las Manzanas – of a basilical layout – is the only one that has continually acted as a place of worship since it was founded in 1562. To one side of the parish of San Pedro, there is a clock that measures an incredible 4.5 metres in diameter. But the thing that most catches visitors' attention in Zacatlán, is a factory where, unsurprisingly, monumental clocks are made.

This factory has been supplying churches and buildings with clocks for their towers since 1919, and it exists thanks to the now-deceased, self-taught clockmaker, Alberto Olvera, who invented the mechanism for his first large-scale timepiece. Around the corner from the factory is a bicycle rental shop that doubles as a clock museum.

Other towns in the area such as Xicotepec and Pahuatlán, and the nearby city of Huauchinango in the northern part of Puebla attract droves of people with their stunning landscapes and cultural treasures, rather than specific heritage monuments. Tetela de Ocampo's reputation

Olmecs, Teotihuacanos, Aztecs and Maya lived in the fortified city of Cantona around 2000 years ago, and the area was popular in pre-Hispanic times due to the economy and commerce provided by a nearby obsidian mine: known as Zaragoza.



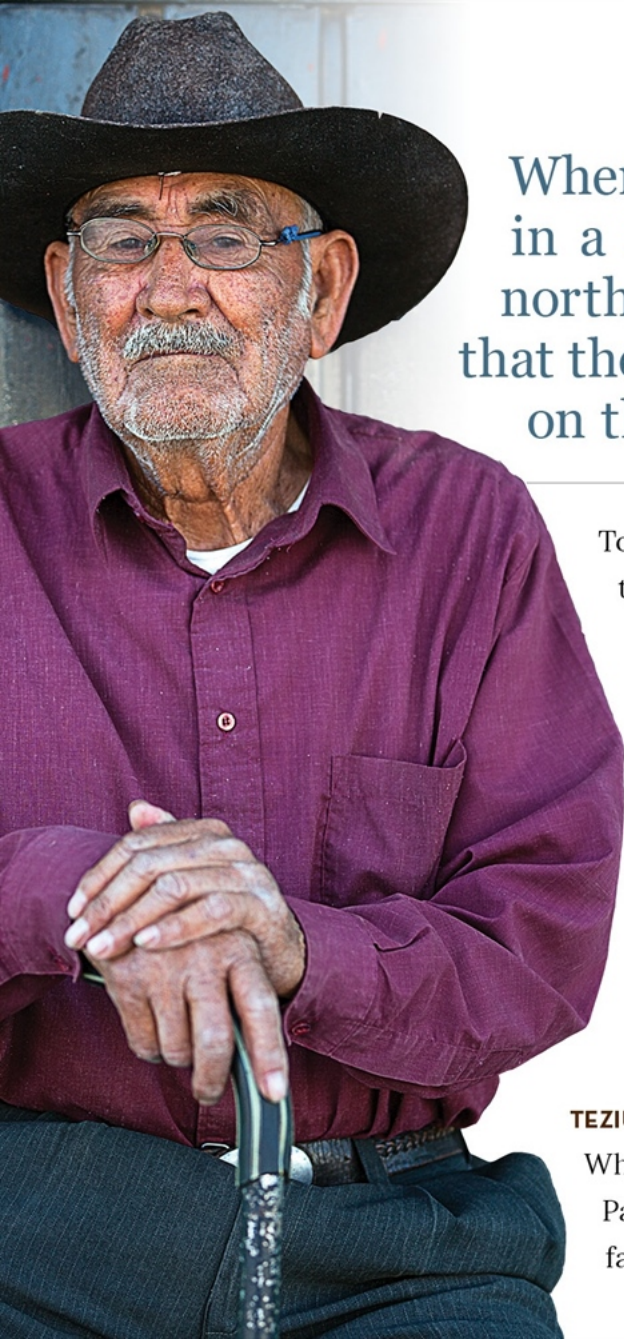


comes from once having housed Juan N. Méndez, the general who led the battle that gave Porfirio Díaz his definitive triumph in 1876. Méndez was also named interim President by Díaz for six months from 1876 to 1877. Xicotepec, for example, is where the vigil was held for the cadaver of Venustiano Carranza, the Mexican president in 1920. He was killed while fleeing from the uprising of the Agua Prieta Plan. These events are narrated in the museum, which can be visited by making a formal request to the municipal president. So you need to be organised.



Not far from here, near San Pablito, the locals maintain their tradition of manufacturing amate paper, just as they did in pre-Hispanic times. The techniques have been passed down through generations, with some modern variants, but the original spirit of the tradition is well and truly alive.





When my grandfather was a boy, he lived in a small town close to Papantla in the north of Veracruz, and he always told me that the fastest way to reach civilisation was on the road to Teziutlán.

To make amate, at dawn (when humidity is high) the bark of the jonote tree is gathered to be used as fibre to glue the paper together. The bark has a hard, dark section as well as a soft and orange-coloured part that is used to make amate. In the family workshop, the bark is boiled in water for a day. Then as soon as it is soft enough, it is rinsed clean, washed with chlorine to remove the original colour and left to drain. Once it is almost dry, it is placed over a smooth purpose-built table, taking care that the edges match up. Then, with a smooth, volcanic stone called a mondó, the fibres are pounded until they are perfectly meshed. Amate is commonly used for drawings, or dyed using natural colours to create patterns and pictures.

TEZIUTLÁN, NOTHING PERSONAL

When my grandfather was a boy, he lived in a small town close to Papantla in the north of Veracruz, and he always told me that the fastest way to reach civilisation was on the road to Teziutlán.



Until the 1940s, when construction on the Mexico City- Huahchinango-Poza Rica highway was completed, to travel from Papantla to Mexico City by car you went through Teziutlán and then on to Puebla. The dirt road that passes through Papantla and along the Veracruz coastlines of Tecolutla and Tuxpan was once bordered by impenetrable jungles. And so I



deduced that the trappings of my grandfather's journeys – riding saddles, hats and lariats – all had to be from Teziutlán. I've always noted that they were of the highest quality and it was a good feeling to imagine him buying them while on his travels.

Today, Teziutlán continues to be one of the most important economic centres of Puebla. Its fair (held in August) is impressive – with bullfights and cockfights and typical dances such as the 'negritos', 'quetzales', and 'santiagos'.

The Chapel of Our Lady of Carmen (from the 18th century) can also be found in town, and it is the only one in Latin America with four identical towers. The municipal palace of heavy pink limestone, built in a neo-classical design, was inaugurated in 1946 by Manuel Ávila Camacho, a native of that city, when he was President of the Republic.



A PRE-HISPANIC CITY

Moving away from the sierra, I head south towards the mountain known as Pizarro. All around it lies great fields that are being irrigated; the tubular structures carrying the water appear like vast, silvery spiders.

It is fairly easy to reach Tepeyahualco and, from there, the archaeological zone of Cantona. Three years ago, to reach Cantona you had to drive on roads that were in terribly bad shape, but today (hats off to the state government), Cantona is on a new highway that will soon become the favourite route for all those travelling into Veracruz.

The Cantona Site Museum was inaugurated in October of 2012, and it is still in gleaming, well-documented condition. Olmecs, Teotihuacanos, Aztecs and Maya lived in the fortified city of Cantona around 2000 years ago, and the area was popular in pre-Hispanic times due to the economy and commerce provided by a nearby obsidian mine: known as Zaragoza.



There are several ball-game courts at Cantona, and from the broad platforms of its pyramids, you can see Mount Pizarro as well as the Peak of Orizaba. Don't miss the opportunity to talk with the museum guards: locals who participated in the excavations and who have many stories to tell.

A PRECIOUS JEWEL

During the Conquest, the Pizarro region was of great economic importance. Hernán Cortés describes it as an 'obligatory stop' for the early Spanish colonists. It is known as part of the route of "the ruins of the mesones". Even today, scattered throughout the zone, vestiges remain of the enormously profitable and opulent endeavours of the Colony, in details such as Tepeyahualco's arches.

At the foot of Mount Pizarro a hacienda with a ruined façade bears the inscription: 'San Nicolás Pizarro'. Today, we use Pizarro (with a 'z') to refer to both the mountain and the settlement that surrounds the perimeter of the big house.

A watchtower commands the entire valley, sprawling in its immensity, furrowed by intense gusts of wind that raise dust devils and create dense, rippling curtains. Found next to the 20-metre tower is the small hermitage dedicated to San Pedro and San Pablo, a precious jewel in the middle of nowhere. Its cupolas and yellow stars glimmer in the sun, and its red motifs provide a proud frame in the midst of the desolate landscape. Both this hacienda and





others in the vicinity – San José Tizaco, Micuautla, San Roque and San Antonio Alchichica – occupy what is now the entire municipality of Tepeyachualco (over 48,500 hectares) belonging to the Limón family.

The Pizarro Hacienda is one of the oldest, its hermitage dating back to the mid-16th century, and within, there are crumbling, roofless arches bearing Talavera porcelain mosaics.

Getting to this point is tantamount to arriving at a sore spot in Mexico's history. It seems unbelievable that all this treasure was once concentrated in the hands of only a few. But the place is also testimony to the fact that the early Spanish colonists were determined, valiant men who gave their lives to build something beautiful in what was once a foreign, hostile land. □





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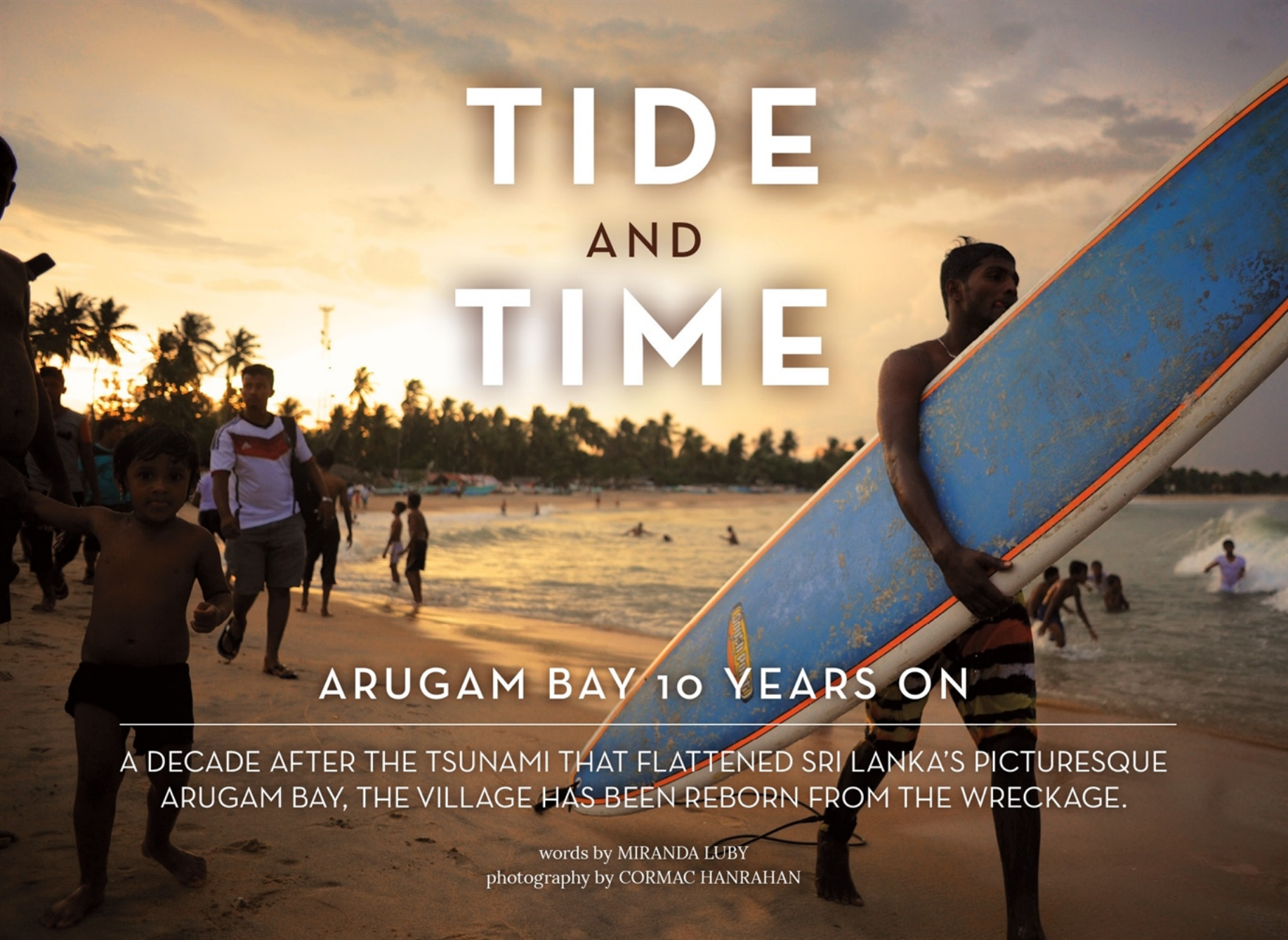
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NG3651-40

A photograph of a beach at sunset. In the foreground, a young boy is walking towards the camera. To the right, a man is carrying a large blue surfboard. In the background, several people are walking on the beach, and others are playing in the water. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun, and palm trees are visible on the horizon.

TIDE AND TIME

ARUGAM BAY 10 YEARS ON

A DECADE AFTER THE TSUNAMI THAT FLATTENED SRI LANKA'S PICTURESQUE ARUGAM BAY, THE VILLAGE HAS BEEN REBORN FROM THE WRECKAGE.

words by MIRANDA LUBY
photography by CORMAC HANRAHAN



A group of bleary-eyed fishermen are seated on plastic chairs stuck into the sand. It's not long after dawn in Arugam Bay. Their work is done for the day and as the aroma of cooking rotti replaces the scent of fish, it's a moment to contemplate the morning's catch.

Behind the men on the beach rest nearly 100 boats. Dryhulled and strewn with untangled fishing nets, the wooden boats look as aged as the dark-skinned men – paint fading like sun-bleached sarongs. It's hard to believe they are less than a decade old. The tsunami made splinters of the old fleet.



DID YOU
KNOW?

Beyond the boats, silhouetted surfers on famed breaks rise and fall like shadow puppets before the Indian Ocean's climbing sun.

While the fishermen mumble at each other in Sinhala, Danny Indraratna, the 53-year-old who owns the shabby juice cart they are gathered around, has his eyes fixed on the waves.

"I love surfing!" he exclaims before racing over to his cart to point out a proudly displayed photo of himself riding a milkyblue right-hander.

He learned as a boy, he explains in broken English, from Arugam Bay's first tourists: one Australian and one American, who came here long before the east-coast fishing village became a hot-spot for surfers.

Today there are almost as many local surfers as foreigners and the dawn ocean is a harmonious blend of boards and boats, a liquid conveyer belt of early morning energy.

"It was a big wave," Danny adds with a boyish grin, still admiring his photo. "Fast."

But there's a sad irony in Danny's comment, and the use of his juice cart as a kind of mantelpiece. Before the tsunami, this is where his home stood. "All of this," Danny gestures across the curved bay taking in the restaurants, small hotels and swaying palms, "All of this gone. All water."

The fishermen's eyes follow Danny's hand. In an instant their demeanours also change and a mixture of emotions filter through their faces. In a community where the locals' lives are so intimately linked to the sea, for both income and pleasure, many are still coming to terms with the day it turned on them and ripped their world apart.





December 2014 marked 10 years since the floor of the Indian Ocean gave the almighty tremble that unhinged its watery jaws and swallowed many coastlines whole.

At the time, Arugam Bay was a burgeoning travel destination due to its remote location in Sri Lanka's conflict-torn eastern province. The village consisted of a handful of small guesthouses and bungalows, surf shops, restaurants and many local homes.

By mid morning on Boxing Day 2004, barely a structure would be left standing.

It is now midday but despite the heat, the curly-haired Tamil's dark skin raises into a thousand tiny bumps as he talks.

In one of these homes, just a short wander along the wide sweeping beachfront from Danny's juice cart, Adersinh Thomas, a restaurateur and father of five, was staring out of his kitchen window when he saw an arid landscape of black rock and gold sand appear where the ocean was a moment before.

"The water was sucked back," he says, eyes bulging with the horror he is describing. "I couldn't see any water.

"Many people ran down to see what had happened, and to find fish, but I felt we shouldn't go. I thought we should run."





Adersinh stands, stony faced, on the site of his former home. Now half-submerged in water that was left after the tsunami, the location lends his story an eerie gravitas.

On the day, Adersinh and his wife Dammika quickly gathered their children and began to flee up the large sandy hill behind the bay. By then, an ominous half-metre wave had re-filled the ocean floor and begun gushing through every crack and crevice of the family home.

Warning waves nipping at their heels, the family scrambled to safety alongside several of their neighbours. Hundreds of others however, including four tourists, did not heed the warning or could not flee in time. Today, little blue tsunami evacuation route signs provide the population an escape route. But in 2004, few even knew what a tsunami was.

Within half an hour of that first wave, a 13-metre-high liquid steamroller had rolled two kilometres inland and flattened everything around Arugam Bay.

Many local survivors recount the days and weeks that followed in a series of vivid freeze-frames: a lone mud-covered woman crouched over a pot of boiling rice in a one-square-metre patch she had cleared in the rubble; a young woman impaled by the sharp fronds



of a palm tree; great lakes of tsunami water festering in the rutted and gouged landscape; a city of tents erected by a team of tourists; fields of rice paddies thick with salt.

But Arun Sulojun, 26, recalls the disaster with all the clarity of a rolling home movie.

“The loudest sound was all the crying,” he says. He’s perched at the wooden bar of his workplace, Mambo’s, a picturesque cluster of cement bungalows on the sand, close to the main surf break. He wears colourful board shorts and a T-shirt with a surfing slogan.

It's now midday but despite the heat, the curly-haired Tamil's dark skin raises into a thousand tiny bumps as he talks.

"After the water left I rode my bike through the rubble and dirt. The crying was coming from everywhere. The entire land was different ... I didn't know where the roads were or where to ride. It was wood and rubble and water ... I was scared then and thought, will the crying ever stop?"

After the water left I rode my bike through the rubble and dirt. The crying was coming from everywhere.

Arun's home, built on higher ground, was spared from the tsunami and having lost no members of his family, the 16-year-old felt compelled to help the less fortunate.

"I didn't have money, no one in Arugam Bay had money, and money helps," Arun explains. "But I had myself to give so I wanted to do that."

It took three months just to clear the village, he says. He and other young locals braved the gruesome task of clearing the countless bloated bodies, and it would be nearly a month before NGOs and government help reached the area. They also spent day after day laboriously removing debris as well as gathering and distributing food and water.





Arun and his friends were the heart of the operation. If there wasn't enough food to go around, they would go without to feed the elderly. If someone fell sick from malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis or from drinking tsunami water, Arun would carry them the four kilometres from one of the refugee camps to hospital. More than one person died in his arms.

"I really wondered how anyone would get over it," he says.

But almost immediately after the clean-up was finished, the rebuilding began and, brick by brick, Arugam Bay has slowly been reborn from the wreckage.

With the locals' brute determination and the help of non-government organisations, government and private investors, it has once again become a thriving fishing, surfing beach and a tourism village with improved local infrastructure such as schools and hospitals.

For tourists, new roads mean a shorter trip from the capital, Colombo, and Arugam Bay now has hundreds more hotels, bungalows and guesthouses while still retaining its charm.



Tuk tuks loaded with surfboarders heading for nearby breaks zoom down the one main road as restaurants prepare fish curry fresh from the morning catch.

Nature, too, has returned with new vivacity; tsunami lagoons have become watering holes for the wild Asian elephant population and along the beachfront, swaying palms have burst skyward from the fine sand at a spectacular rate.



Today, behind Arun, the sound of crying from the rubble has been replaced by joyful whoops as the locals play beach cricket, start sand fights and swim in the shallower waves.

The sound causes his face to break into an endearingly broad grin, huge white teeth dwarfing his small features, and it's clear he has managed to move on. Much like his town, the young man, who matured in a post-tsunami Arugam Bay, still bears the scars of the past, but is determined not to let it dictate his future.

"I think it is better than ever for the locals here. It has everything now," says Arun, who hopes one day to own his own business.

And he's pleased to welcome more tourists to the town.

"Yes, they taught me how to surf," he laughs.

As the sun sets, it's now the palm trees' turn to stand in shadow as the evening-session surfers catch waves into the pink-hued horizon. Come dusk, they are forced to surrender to the fading light, while the fishing boats remain slumbering in the sand until the just before dawn.

For the next few hours this fragment of the Indian Ocean will be empty, left to churn in the dark on its own. 





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MAP

WYOMING'S TOP 3

- *America's first national park, Yellowstone National Park, is well known for its wild geothermal activity, including the perpetually punctual geyser, 'Old Faithful'.*
- *For those after the white stuff, Jackson Hole is a premier ski destination serving as a gateway to some of the finest winter sports in the world.*
- *Visit the Wild West town of Cody, the home of 'Buffalo Bill' Cody – the legendary stagecoach driver and buffalo hunter.*





DID YOU
KNOW?



BOLD & BEAUTIFUL

NORTH DAKOTA – with its sweeping plains, rugged badlands and vigorous outdoor living that transformed the life of former U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt – still lures intrepid travellers seeking adventure. Theodore Roosevelt National Park's 280-square kms of staggeringly beautiful scenery form a striking backdrop for a world of hiking, camping, fishing, mountain biking and absorbing the great outdoors. To absorb the rich history of the region, a visit to the North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum offers guests 3716 square metres of exhibits tracing the state's history back 600 million years ago. Or experience what life was like at a frontier military fort at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, also home to the On-a-Slant Mandan Indian Village, where reconstructed earth lodges offer insight into how Mandan Indians once lived.



NORTH DAKOTA'S TOP 3

- Medora is home to the famous outdoor Medora Musical and Pitchfork Steak Fondue during summer, and home to Bully Pulpit, one of the finest golf courses in the entire region, set within the spectacular badlands.
- Just outside of Bismarck-Mandan is Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, home to the Custer House and On-a-Slant Mandan Indian Village. Embrace history and engage with high-tech interactive exhibits at the newly expanded State Museum in Bismarck.
- There are five reservations across North Dakota, many showcasing the lives of the Native people throughout history. Powwows are held throughout the summer in many communities and feature the ancient dancing, drumming and pageantry.



DID YOU
KNOW?





BIG SKY COUNTRY

ONE VISIT TO MONTANA and it's easy to see why America's fourth-largest state is known as 'Big Sky Country.' From the soaring peaks of the Rocky Mountains and Glacier National Park, to the prairie views of eastern Montana, you will find endless opportunities to explore the stunning scenery, awe-inspiring wildlife and rich cultural heritage.

Home to numerous working and guest ranches, Montana is the place to saddle up and take a trail ride and experience the western ranch life. From the charming gateway communities visitors can tour the site of Custer's Last Stand and the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument or follow the Lewis and Clark trail that criss-crosses Montana. History lovers can delve into the gold rush towns of Virginia City and Nevada City, journey into the prehistoric past along the Montana Dinosaur Trail, and experience Native American traditions at a tribal powwow.

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Glacier National Park along Montana's northern border is known as 'The crown jewel of the continent.' Its best known feature, The Going-To-The-Sun Road, is an 84km historic highway scaling the park's mountainous backbone.*
- *Big Sky Resort is an awesome 2347 hectare ski destination that is as fun as it is challenging. The village is home to great music, restaurants and cafes.*
- *Montana is home to seven Indian reservations and 11 tribes, so visitors can experience Native American culture at the state's many powwows and cultural centres.*



DID YOU
KNOW?



HEART OF THE ROCKIES

DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE REAL AMERICA lies South Dakota – home to six national parks and monuments that seamlessly blend natural beauty, history and cultural heritage. Each region of South Dakota offers a vast variety of recreational activities to suit all lifestyles. Unique landscapes are complemented by vast streams of history and a passionate local appreciation for the state's heritage. In the Black Hills, legendary monuments like Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Crazy Horse Memorial epitomise the great faces and wonderful places in this beautiful state, while the Historic Gold Rush town of Deadwood allows visitors to see how the Wild West shaped present day South Dakota. Visitors can step back in time to the pioneer days of South Dakota at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Homestead and attractions in De Smet.

SOUTH DAKOTA'S TOP 3

- *Drive the Peter Norbeck National Scenic Byway to take in 112 kms of breathtaking views of some of the Black Hills' most stunning scenery including mountain tunnels, hairpin curves and slender granite pinnacles.*
- *Experience the legendary Mount Rushmore National Memorial mountain carving, honouring past presidents Washington, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Lincoln. Then visit nearby Crazy Horse Memorial to witness the progress being made on this mountain carving honouring the legendary Native American warrior.*
- *Custer State Park in the beautiful Black Hills is full of lush forests, serene meadows and majestic mountains, and it is home to one of the world's largest publicly owned bison herds of nearly 1300. Each September cowboys and girls saddle up on horseback, making a unique spectacle out of driving in the herd.*



RETURN TO TOP



DID YOU
KNOW?



An elephant with small tusks stands in a lush savanna landscape. The elephant is positioned in the center-right of the frame, facing slightly left. The background is filled with tall, golden-brown grass and dense green trees under a bright sky. The overall scene is a vibrant depiction of African wildlife.

OKAVANGO MAGIC

THE FRAGILE AFRICAN DELTA OFFERS THE PERFECT EXECUTIVE GAP-YEAR ESCAPE.

words and photography by DAVID MCGONIGAL



PHOTO
GALLERY

The lioness stopped and stared at Sandra. As they maintained eye contact, a complete silence filled the 4WD. I calculated whether there was any possibility that our guide could reach his rifle before the predator was in the vehicle. There wasn't. The lioness blithely strolled away to resume gnawing on her breakfast of fresh buffalo entrails.

"I could have touched her," my wife whispered in a voice full of wonder. "She was so close – and so beautiful."



It was just after dawn at Vumbura Plains Camp in Botswana's Okavango Delta. My wife Sandra was far outside her natural environment of Australia's boardrooms and corner offices. When she left her role as CEO of a leading media organisation she'd rarely been overseas for longer than a fortnight (and that was for the Cannes Television Festival). She'd gone straight from school to the base of the corporate ladder and then climbed it with great success for several decades.

"Let me show you the world now that you have the chance," was my offer to fill her new freedom. I spoke from experience as my professional career consisted of dropping out





of the legal profession soon after dropping into it – to shift into the considerably less structured (and infinitely less lucrative) world of travel writing.

Nothing had prepared Sandra for Africa. It was a long way from the corporate jungle to the floodplains of the Okavango; from bulldust to bulrushes.

When seeking the world's great wilderness experiences, it's impossible to overlook the Okavango. Here, the January rains in the Angola highlands flow into one of the world's largest inland deltas several months later. The floods peak in July-August, Botswana's dry season, when the inundated area goes from about 6000 square kilometres to 16,000 square kilometres.

The convoluted landscape limits road building and ensures that visitors fly in small planes from Maun, near the south-eastern edge of the delta, to numerous gravel airstrips near

the camps. Most of Botswana is occupied by the Kalahari Desert which, from the air, looks significantly less user-friendly than Australia's Simpson Desert. That makes the abrupt transition from desert dunes to lush green grasslands a maze of waterways and 150,000 islands even more remarkable. The delta spills into the flat desert and gives it life before evaporating into a cloudless sky.

Not surprisingly, the Okavango attracts countless creatures that would otherwise find desert life too tough. Animals gather in a profusion that gives the impression of a Garden of Eden. In 2013 the Okavango Delta was declared one of Africa's Seven Natural Wonders and became the 1000th UNESCO World Heritage Site in June 2014.



AT XIGERA CAMP (pronounced Keejera) on Paradise Island within the Moremi Game Reserve, we took to the water in a small motor boat. This was a true delta experience as the camp and its surrounds comprise a lot more water than land. In the evening light the reeds of the delta appeared as brushstrokes against the burnished bronze of the water. At



times we were under a rich green canopy of tall papyrus. Although the clear water flowed swiftly, nothing ruffled the mirrored surface of the water apart from our wake.

That was until a large bull elephant silently broke through dense riverbank reeds, just metres away, intent on an early dinner of young shoots, several kilograms at a time. He towered above us and we were held in awe as he ate, apparently oblivious to our presence. Finally he turned back into the bush and we breathed again.

We weaved a route back to the makeshift dock turning down one overgrown passage after another – each indistinguishable from the last. When I mentioned this to Barobi, our driver, he laughed and said “I grew up here and every stand of reeds is as recognisable to me as city blocks are to you.”

That night started and finished with heart-warming tiny sightings. Darkness fell with tropical abruptness and our spotlight beam soon picked up a red eyeshine. But, Cheshire

Wildebeest, kudus, ostriches, tsessebes and giraffes had declined the most while the large elephant population is stable at about 130,000, and hippo populations have increased.



Cat-like, there seemed to be no animal attached. We didn't want to dazzle the creature with constant light but we finally discerned the tiny form of a bushbaby – a primate that may weigh just 70 grams. It disappeared and we continued to dinner. At dawn the next morning we set off for the airstrip with baby warthogs running alongside our vehicle.

“There are so many incredible moments here – even lion cubs playing around a kill,” Sandra said in awe that morning. “But a warthog family takes me back to when my then-young daughters insisted on watching *The Lion King* over and over,” she said. “Now Pumbaa is a travel memory.”

THE OKAVANGO DELTA may be a wonder but there are threats to its future. Angola provides about 95 percent of the catchment runoff with Namibia and Botswana providing the balance: Botswana contributes 20 percent of the Delta's runoff. About 1.2 million people live along the Okavango (called the Cubango in Angola) and droughts, particularly in Namibia have seen some water diverted so it never reaches the Delta. If that escalates it could doom the Delta so the nations have combined in OKACOM, the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission.

Even so, in 2011 *The Guardian* reported that, as a result of “drought, habitat encroachment, bushfire and poaching” aerial surveys found some species suffering population declines of up to 90 percent over the previous 15 years.





Wildebeest, kudus, ostriches, tsessebes and giraffes had declined the most while the large elephant population is stable at about 130,000, and hippo populations have increased.

North east and adjacent to the Okavango Delta, on a substantial lagoon on the Linyanti River, Kings Pool Camp was a revelation because it harbours one of the densest dry season concentrations of elephants in Botswana.

“Oh look, there’s a family of elephants with a tiny baby swimming across the river,” Sandra exclaimed on a sunset cruise aboard the camp’s rather ungainly double-decker barge.

“Careful with your drink,” I replied. “You’re just about to baptise a hippo with South African sauvignon blanc.” The hippo submerged in two indignant streams of bubbles.

Our single glasses of wine were a big night out in safari terms. Very early wake-ups and late-night drives resulted in dinners being sleepy preludes to falling into bed.





Wilderness Safari's camp accommodation was remarkably luxurious, whether the thatched Kings Pool room with its burnished wooden floor or our airy Vumbura Plains cabin complete with a free-standing marble-floored shower area and under-deck visiting hippo.

The following morning Dia, our guide, located many more elephants, zebra and giraffes, a nursery of lion cubs and two young male lions with imposing manes posing like bookends. The vain lions would be disappointed that we found a large flock of brightly coloured Southern Carmine Bee-eaters feeding on a sandy riverbank to be more spectacular.

As we flew out of Botswana, Sandra wrote in her diary:

"The infuriating buzz of a pre-dawn alarm used to signal an early morning flight to an interstate meeting. Here the 5am knock on the door is the beginning of another day in wonderland. The sliver of pink on the horizon really seems to mark a new dawn." □





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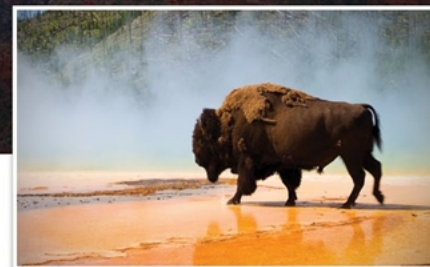


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LIGHTS

WILL GUIDE YOU

HOME

A SEARCH FOR FAMILY ROOTS LEADS TO
A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD COMMUNITY ON
THE CROATIAN COAST.

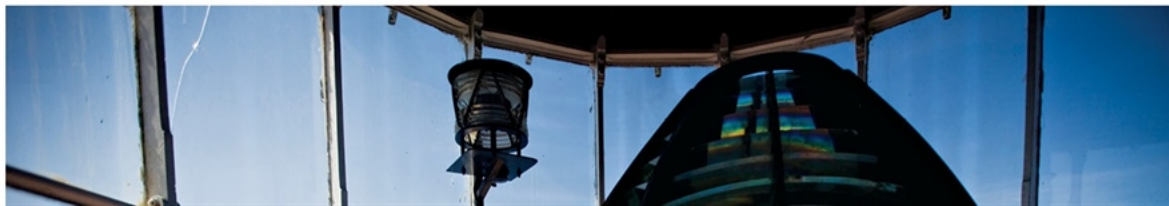
by PAUL KVINTA



I'VE BEEN WARNED THAT like almost everyone living in Croatia's Dalmatian Islands, Jure Kvinta suffers from pomalo, a condition said to be so insidious, so overwhelming, so unstoppable, that it could undermine my entire mission. That would be tragic. I've come all the way to Croatia to find Jure, to conduct business of the utmost importance. Jure is the lighthouse keeper on Lastovo Island, one of the most far-flung and isolated of the Dalmatians. By all accounts, Lastovo is an enchanting little outpost, a place of limestone peaks and hidden inlets with just 600 people living in a medieval village surrounded by vineyards and olive groves.

THE LIGHTHOUSE ITSELF IS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A FAIRYTALE, I'm told, a majestic beacon perched on a 70-metre cliff overlooking the shimmering Adriatic. Jure's father kept the lighthouse, as did his father before him. Admittedly, I've become fairly obsessed with the structure ever since seeing a photo of it online.

There are 48 Croatian lights scattered across the Adriatic, each stunning and inspiring in its own way. But only the one on Lastovo has a connection to my decidedly obscure, Slavic last name – Kvinta. Given that there aren't that many Kvintas on the planet, my mission

DID YOU
KNOW?



is simple: travel to Lastovo, meet Jure, determine if we're kin, and claim possible bragging rights to having a fabulous European lighthouse in my family. But the full implications of pomalo don't reveal themselves until halfway into my five-hour ferry ride from the mainland city of Split, when I notice that my fellow passengers can hardly keep their clothes on. By the time we reach Brac Island, the blonde to my left has discarded her sweater and is sunning herself in a lacy, push-up bra. By Hvar, the two hairy, middle-aged men to my right have abandoned their shirts and ordered more beer. By Korcula, the young guys behind me are down to their boxers and smoking a hookah pipe as big as a barber pole.

Things deteriorate from there.

When I can finally make out Lastovo in the distance, the push-up bra has disappeared completely, the hookah is making its way around the ship, and several crew members have joined the hairy guys in belting out a medley of Croatian folk songs.



“Pomalo,” mutters the Italian grandmother seated next to me, shaking her head.

She spits out the word like an unexpected anchovy on a pizza. Pomalo, she explains, is an entrenched Dalmatian philosophy of life that suggests some combination of “easy,” “slowly,” “no problem,” “maybe tomorrow,” “relax,” and “have another coffee.” All of which is fine, Grandma concedes, unless you actually need to accomplish something. “I have a 400-year-old house on Korcula,” she says. “It needs work. You think I can get these people to work on my house? Look at them. Mama mia! It is impossible!”

I’d been assured that Jure would meet me at the ferry terminal on Lastovo, but after all the passengers disembark and disperse, I’m left standing there alone. I had entertained romantic notions of presenting my ID to Jure, of embracing him right there on the dock as my long-lost cousin. But he’s nowhere in sight. I dig for my mobile phone.

“Jure, this is Paul Kvinta.”

“I cannot get you,” he says, sounding like he’s still waking from a nap. “Take a taxi.”

“A taxi?” There are no taxis. There are no cars. I’d studied the map. The village is 10 kilometres from here, the lighthouse three kilometres beyond that. I look across the dusty road. There’s the ferry office, a tiny grocery store, and the Lizard Lounge. That’s it.

“I will call you a taxi,” Jure says and hangs up.

Pomalo.

I lug my suitcase to the Lizard and wait.

The cab winds through pine forests and over hills until I finally glimpse the lighthouse rising alone at the end of a windswept peninsula.

Croatia has 1244 islands sprinkled along its rocky coast, and Luka Bekic, director of the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar, spends his time trolling their shores. He recovers evidence of the maritime powers that have historically battled for control here: the Romans, Illyrians, Venetians, and others. “Even the Romans probably built some kind of lighthouses,” Bekic explained, “Maybe just metal baskets with fire.” By the 19th century the Austro-Hungarian Empire had erected 48 proper lighthouses on the islands, locating them near strategic shipping lanes. After Croatia declared its independence in 1991, the government refurbished several of the lighthouses and assigned them double-duty





as inns. Today, island-hopping travellers can rent apartments in 11 Croatian lighthouses, including Jure's.

"Mr. Kvinta?" a woman inquires as I step from the taxi. She's leaning against the low stone wall encircling the lighthouse. She pronounces "Kvinta" not like I do (kuh-VIN-tuh) but like some of my relatives back in Texas: "Quinta".

"That's me," I say, handing her my passport.

She studies it.

“Yes, Quinta,” she acknowledges and introduces herself as Nada, Jure’s wife. In broken English she explains that Jure should be back soon. She has auburn hair, gentle eyes and an inviting smile. My heart warms at the thought that she might be family. I whip out my notebook and begin rifling questions. Is Jure’s family originally from Croatia? How long have Kvintas been on Lastovo? Where...

Nada throws up both hands. “Easy, Quinta, easy,” she protests. “Pomalo, pomalo. No working!” she insists. “Coffee.”

Their cottage sits in the shadow of the lighthouse, and we cross a patio to the front porch. On a picnic table Nada plunks down two coffee cups and two shot glasses. In the former she pours thick, black Turkish coffee. In the latter she pours rakija, a grape-fermented Adriatic liquor. Coffee and rakija. That’s how they roll in the Dalmatians.

“Zivjeli!” she says, clinking glasses with me and downing the sweet nectar. We have some more. Then some more after that.

After several fortifying rounds, I wobble over to the lighthouse to see my accommodation. The structure, built in 1839, consists of a single-story, whitewashed building with green shutters and a limestone tower rising from the roof. My apartment is reached via a dark and moody corridor, but the digs themselves are delightfully spacious and airy. I park my gear and climb 98 steps to the top of the tower, where I find a 1½ metre-tall, rotating glass





lens and a mesmerising view of the Adriatic. I look south, where there's no land for over 160 kilometres between me and Italy's boot heel. I step onto a catwalk outside and, circling around, catch a bird's-eye view of Jure and Nada's life: their vegetable garden, the vats where they ferment rakija and wine from their own grapes, the table where Jure cleans his daily catch. On the patio, a torn fishing net waits to be mended. Their curly haired dog suns itself on the lighthouse steps. In the distance I spy a moped sputtering up the unpaved road. By the time I descend the tower, Jure is strolling through the front gate. I introduce myself.

"Yes, yes," he says. "You are Quinta, I know." Jure resembles a lion with a mane of wild curls, intense eyes and several days of stubble.



“We might be related,” I suggest, hopefully.

“Maybe,” he says, eyeballing me. “There is plenty of time to discuss that. Have you had coffee?”

Nada pours us more coffee and rakija.

Sensing that we’re not going to discuss genealogy anytime soon, I inquire about activities on the island. I’d heard about hiking, scuba diving, boating.

By the 19th century the Austro-Hungarian Empire had erected 48 proper lighthouses on the islands, locating them near strategic shipping lanes.

“You could take a nap,” Jure suggests, lighting a cigarette.

“Yes, nap,” Nada seconds. “This Robinson Crusoe place. Peaceful. You must to relax. Later for working.”

Instead I choose to explore Lastovo village, only to find that everyone is doing exactly what Jure and Nada are doing – drinking coffee and hanging out. In the cafés along Ulica Pjevor, clusters of old men laugh and talk animatedly with their hands. I order a cappuccino, and soon I’m chatting with white-haired Luka Fulmizi, who tells me something mind-boggling. “My house is a thousand years old,” he says. “We’ve been in it for 40 generations.” Would you like to see it?





Soon Fulmizi and I are climbing the narrow stone streets of Lastovo, a vertical village set in a natural amphitheatre, which, curiously, faces inland rather than toward the sea. Unlike other Dalmatian towns laid out proudly on seafront real estate – places like Split, Hvar, and Dubrovnik – Lastovo has hidden completely its churches, bell towers and red-roofed villas from the scrutiny of passing ships. Fulmizi shrugs. “We were notorious pirates,” he



says. After the Venetians destroyed the then seaside Lastovo in 998 as punishment for its pirating ways, residents built a new village undetectable to the outside world. They then promptly resumed attacking Venetian ships.

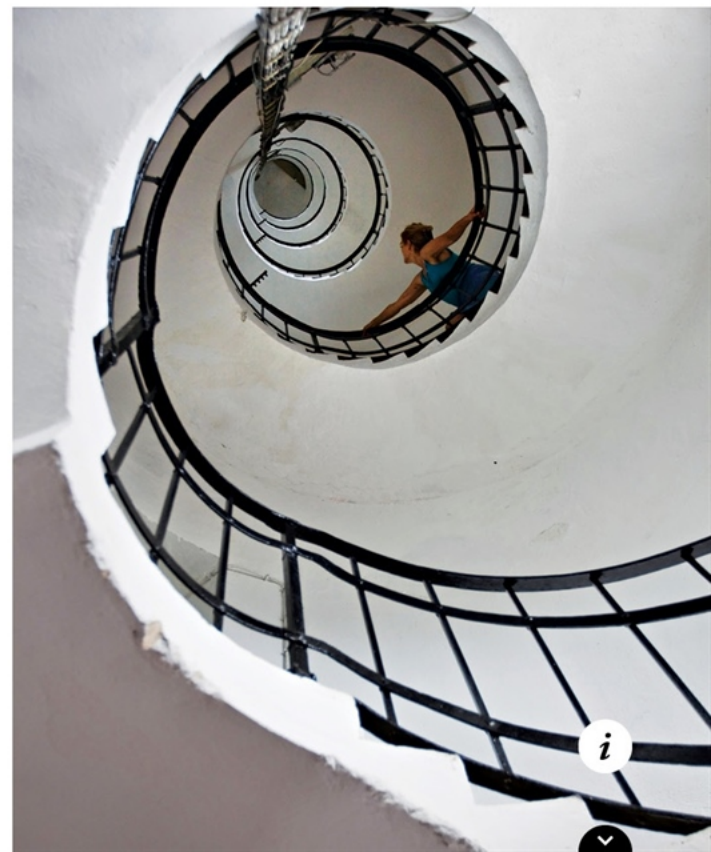
Fulmizi's four-storey home with its thick walls and gracious verandah was the third house built after the Venetian sacking. He leads me to the indoor well that provides his drinking water. There's a five-inch-deep groove in the lip where ropes have worn down the stone, the result of 10 centuries of hoisting water to the surface. "But why have water when we can have wine?" Fulmizi says, as we segue to his wine cellar. Pouring me a glass of dry red, he explains that it comes from the 1500 vines he tends not far from the village.

Later, after we part ways, I seek more perspective by scrambling to the top of 417-metre Hum peak, Lastovo's highest point. From here I can see not only Jure's lighthouse but two others, just barely, one on Susac Island 32 kilometres to the west and one on Glavat, almost the same distance to the east. Both uninhabited islands are even smaller than Lastovo.

Gazing at these lighthouses and at the endless water in all directions I sense the isolation. I can see why folks here might be wary of energetic, overeager outsiders who can't sit still.

I decide to embrace pomalo.

This doesn't mean I cease all activities. In fact, over the next several days, I manage to scuba dive the site of a Roman shipwreck off Lastovo's northeast corner, where



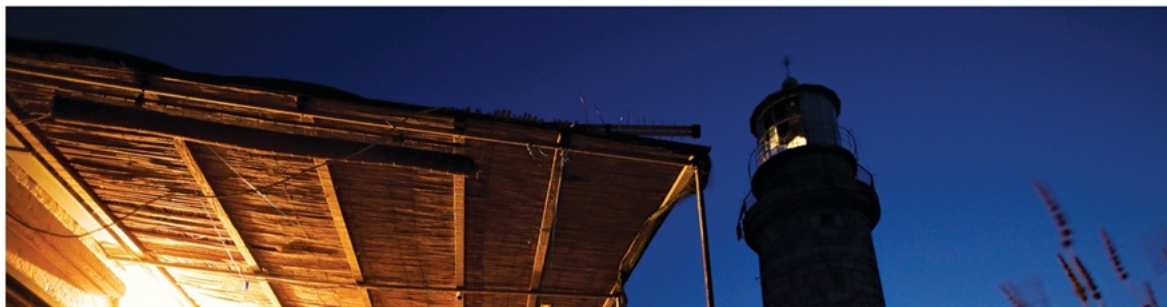
the seafloor at 27 metres is littered with amphorae, the ceramic vessels that Romans used to transport wine. I also take a boat to Glavat Island, a speck of land 137 metres wide, where the only residents are thousands of shrieking gulls that circle round and round the lighthouse.

But mostly, I spend my time chilling with Jure and Nada at the lighthouse. We talk music. We talk soccer. Jure takes me fishing. Nada makes me exquisite meals from our catch: pan-fried bonito in olive oil, grilled lobster, octopus goulash, all washed down with bottomless glasses of wine. “Eat, Quinta!” Nada exhorts. “Eat!”

Slowly, bit by bit, some family history emerges. “It’s funny,” Jure says one afternoon while patching his net on the patio, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

“When my grandfather kept the lighthouse, this place was Italy. When my father was here, it was Yugoslavia. Now I am here, and it is Croatia. We have lived in three different countries, but we have not gone anywhere!”

Then, one evening at sunset, with a breeze coming off the sea and Nada’s spread out before us – chilled tuna and vegetable antipasto salad—the information dam breaks. We’re well into our first bottle of red when my hosts suddenly produce a trove of books, family photos,





ID cards, documents of every sort. One book mentions the name Kvinta on Lastovo as far back as the 1600s. Hmm. How do I square that with the fact that my great-grandfather came from what is today the Czech Republic, some 700 miles north of here?

“The Austro-Hungarian Empire included both Croatians and Czechs,” Jure says. “Maybe they moved about within the empire.”

Then Nada raises another complicating factor: What if Jure isn’t Slavic at all but Italian? It’s possible that his name really is Quinta, which is common in Italy. We’re stumped. Uncertain how to proceed, we start a second bottle.

I ask Jure for his story, and he launches into it, how he was the lighthouse keeper first on Palagruza Island, then Susac, then Lastovo; how he and Nada survived Serbian bombing; how they happily raised two children here at the lighthouse.

“Family,” Nada says, becoming misty-eyed.

“To family!” Jure toasts. “Zivjeli!”



By our third bottle, the lighthouse is flashing its mighty beam across the dark sea, a bazillion stars are twinkling above, and Jure's face has begun blurring into Nada's. "Do you have children, Quinta?" Jure-Nada asks. There's a little girl, I explain, in an orphanage; I'm trying to adopt her. Intrigued with this, Nada grabs my hand and begins reading my palm. Jure translates. "You will get your daughter, Quinta," they tell me. "But wait. There's more." Nada carefully examines my creases and swirls. "You will have a son too. A biological son!"

"Zivjeli!"

According to my palm, there's only one way this son can come into being. "You and your wife must come to the lighthouse," says Jure-Nada. "We will lock you in there for 10 days. The food we will pass through your window. Outside we will parade around the lighthouse and cheer you on: Go, Quinta, go!"

"Zivjeli!"

I hold on to the table, trying to digest this astonishing prediction and trying even harder to keep from falling into my salad. That's when Nada, with eyes burning, thrusts her face within inches of mine and howls, "Come home to lighthouse, Quinta! Come home!"

We laugh. We cry. We haven't a shred of proof that we're related, and yet, via the mysteries of pomalo, Jure and Nada graciously accept me as family. As for the lighthouse, not only can I claim it, I can call it home. 



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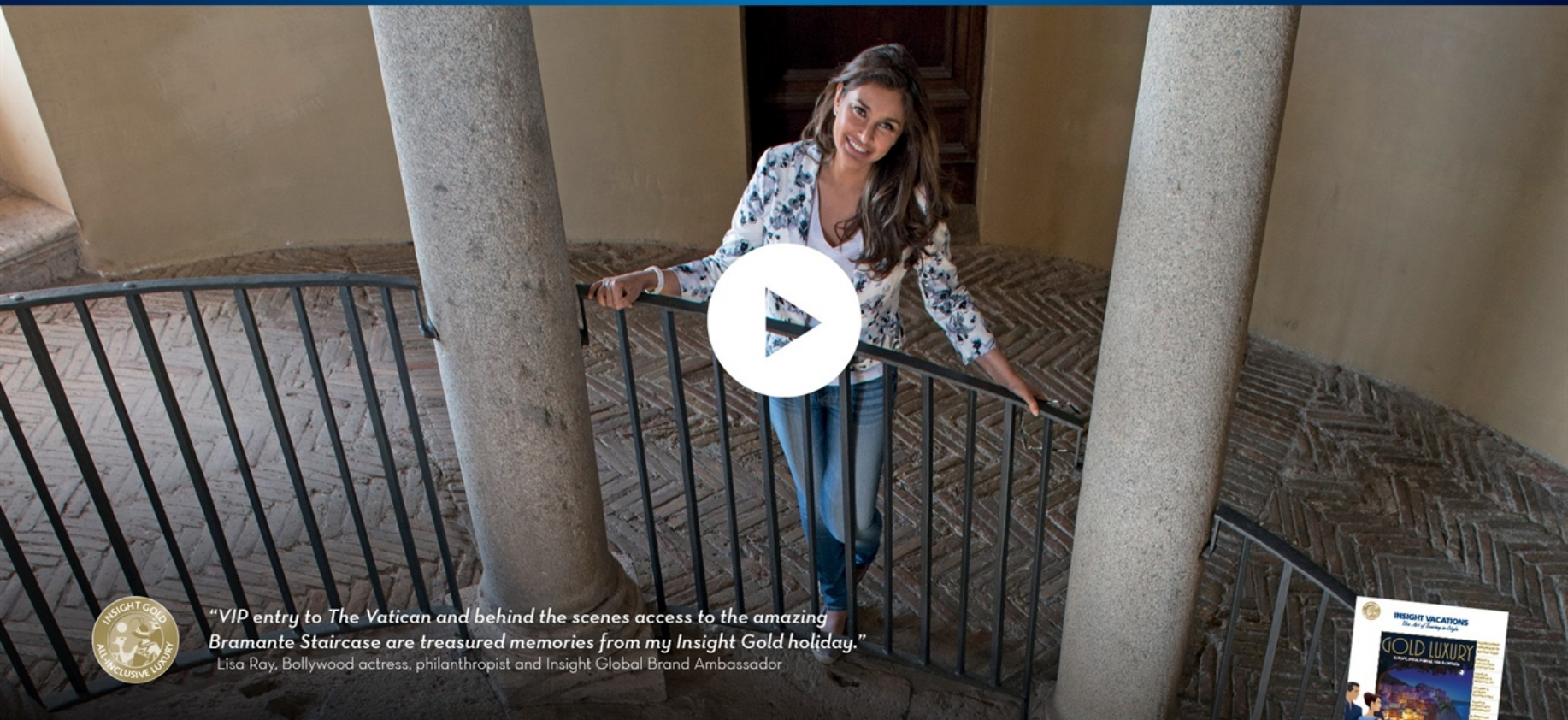
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SPIRITED AWAY

An aerial photograph of a wide, calm river flowing through a dense, lush green forest. In the center of the river, a speedboat filled with people is moving towards the left, leaving a white wake. To the right, a white seaplane is docked on a small platform, with two people standing nearby. Further right, a large, multi-decked ferry is also docked. The forest on the left bank is particularly dense and vibrant green.

IN THE ANCIENT OUTBACK OF AUSTRALIA'S
NORTHERN TERRITORY, A SENSE OF SPIRIT AND
ADVENTURE IS CONTINUALLY UNVEILING ITSELF.

words by MICHELLE HESPE
photography by ANTHONY ONG

PHOTO
GALLERY

There is a tiny red-crested bird with stick-like legs completely out of proportion to its body, walking confidently across lily pads in Kakadu National Park. It looks as though it's wearing a little red cap and a brown suit jacket, but that's not the most fascinating part of the Lily Hopper's body: it has five twig-like toes that fan out wider than its body so it can evenly disperse its weight. This means it can walk on water and, as it dashes around, there is barely a ripple. But things change quickly in the wild, and suddenly the scaly snout of a saltwater crocodile breaks through the water and it lunges at the bird, teeth visible to everyone aboard the boat tour.

There's a thundering clap as the crocodile's jaws meet one another, sans bird snack. Everyone is staring in open-mouthed silence as the lagoon fills with a crescendo of bird sounds – wings in rapid motion, webbed feet scrabbling, squawks, cries and whistles clashing.

“Whoah,” says our guide as the boat glides further into the wetlands of Yellow Water Billabong. “I didn't think they'd bother going for something that small, although someone told me they saw a croc eat a Lily Hopper last week.”





As the unsuccessful croc disappears into the murky water, a buffalo makes it way down to the water's edge, its eyes a flash of yellow-green before it submerges.

Buffalos are common in the national park, and a creature that many locals don't like. In the 1800s, English settlers introduced the Kakadu buffalo just north-east of Darwin, bringing it over water from Timor. But when their settlement was abandoned, the lumbering beasts were set free, their numbers rapidly multiplying until they became a pest – kicking off a buffalo boom that continued for around 180 years. Today, due to culling, buffalo numbers have gone down but many local people have requested that they are not all killed, as they make good hunting fodder. However, the animals also do a lot of damage to the environment, trampling over native species and causing erosion, and so the buffalo debate continues.



I wonder why a croc would go for a tiny bird when it could have a go at a buffalo. The guide reads my mind. “You’d have to be a big croc to take on a buffalo,” she says. A woman sitting behind me laughs: “That bird would be like a bit of popcorn to a saltie.”



Yellow Water Billabong is the region’s most famous wetland, located at the end of Jim Jim Creek, which flows on from South Alligator River. It’s a birdwatchers’ paradise - its wetlands, river channels, floodplains and swamps are home to more than 60 bird species. Even more excitingly for a twitcher, there are some 280 species of birds in Kakadu, which is a third of all Australian birds.



As the boat ploughs deeper into the wetlands, we're surrounded by a flotilla of pink lotus flowers, their thick green leaves forming a tarp over the water, which we're told, is teeming with barramundi – the ultimate souvenir for many visiting this part of the world. The boat rounds another bend in the river and before us spreads a wetland hosting a festival of birds. In a space of less than a kilometre square, there are majestic sea eagles; plumed, wandering and whistling ducks; magpie geese; pied herons; white Australian ibis and an eye-catching Azure kingfisher.

“Here’s a tip that the Indigenous people have long been savvy to,” says our guide. “Catch the dirty magpie geese, as they are the ones that have been digging around in the mud eating water chestnuts. That means they have a belly full of them. They’re already stuffed!”

Alongside us now, on the riverbank, is a female saltwater crocodile. Her scales are a blonde-brown, golden even, as she slips into the water. From behind us, a large four-metre male appears. His movements are swift and determined as he glides up to her. She makes a snorting sound, which our guide says is a sound of submission, but the male swims right on by, both of them eyeing one another off, their precise movements strong yet graceful.



“We might’ve had a scene there as we’re now moving into mating season, but it seems the big croc wasn’t interested,” the guide says, laughing at the lady’s expense.

In 1971, saltwater crocodiles were protected, as there were only about 10,000 left in the wild due to people hunting and killing them. Today, however, there are around 100,000 crocodiles in the Territory, and usually one human life is lost to them every two years or so. Sadly, in 2014, there were four deaths.

“The deaths are almost always because someone is being silly,” says our guide. “Swimming in their territory or fishing right on the bank. People think because numbers aren’t high, it’s safer to swim.”

From Yellow Water I hit the long, empty, dead-straight highway that defines driving in the Australian outback – a clean slice through searing red landscape that burns brightly against the sky. When you’re on those roads looking out at the endless landscape covered in spinifex, swathes of spear grass and clumps of pandanus, it’s hard to comprehend that



only short drives away the land drops dramatically into gorges, and climbs up into toasted orange and blood-red jagged escarpments above wetlands where hilltops shimmer in the heat.

That's the kind of landscape that makes up Ubirr, a special place in Kakadu where the hundreds of pieces of rock art tell stories of creation, life and the traditional foods in the area.

Climbing up the rocky outcrops of Ubirr for sunset is a rite of passage. Sitting on the ledge above a landscape so wide and spectacular in its untouched beauty, it's hard not to be swept up by the ancient magic in this part of the world. It's easy to imagine Indigenous Australians – the Gagudji people in this area – sitting on the same ledge, spears in hand, talking and resting as dusk fell and kangaroos emerged to graze the open plains.



In the bushland at the base of Ubirr lookout are remarkably intact cave drawings depicting the type of animals hunted by traditional people. The area had an abundance of resources – drawings of fish, waterfowl, mussels, wallabies, goannas, echidnas and yams cover the cave walls and crevices. Looking up into one of the rocky outcrops where people would have once taken set up camp, there, at the height of three-storey building, is a painting of a spirit in the immense ceiling overhang. How the work of art could have been painted





in that completely out of reach place is perplexing. The overhang can't be reached from the ground above the cave, and certainly not from below. The traditional owners say it is a painting by Mimi spirits. Stories tell that the spirits came out of the cracks in the rocks, pulled the ceiling rock down, painted the sorcery image, then put the rock back into place.

A few hours back down the road is Darwin: home to most of the Northern Territory's population, with more than half of the states' 240,000 people living there. It's Australia's northern-most capital city and it's surrounded by outback, ocean and other natural wonders such as waterfall-rich Litchfield National Park.

There are around 100,000 crocodiles in the Territory, and usually one human life is lost to them every two years or so.

One local man who is the best ambassador that the Northern Territory could hope for, is Matt Wright, known for Outback Wrangler on Nat Geo Wild.

Matt grew up in Papua New Guinea, Cairns and South Australia, before making his home in the Northern Territory. He was playing with snakes and anything that crawled or slithered while other kids were into Barbies and toy cars. He's a chopper pilot, crocodile-egg collector, wild-animal relocater and all-round great Aussie guy. He's at ease when he's shooting through the skies in a small plane or a chopper, or when he's spending time with dangerous animals.

To share the wild world that is his playground and workplace, Matt has launched a business called Outback Floatplane Adventures. Matt's tour has been voted number one experience in the Top End and it's not hard to see why. A typical day with Matt includes a small plane ride from Darwin, a BBQ lunch on a boat in the river, on the roof of which Matt lands his chopper to take guests on joy rides out into the surrounding outback and wild bushlands. Add to that an exhilarating ride on an airboat down Sweets River (where the notorious five-metre saltie called Sweetheart was removed after killing people at will), through swamps and rainforest, barramundi fishing and crocodile meetings.



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Anyone with a dream of experiencing real Aussie outback is sure to have Uluru at the top of their bucket list. The big red rock is one Australia's most well-known natural, spiritually imbued landmarks that was created over 600 million years ago. Interestingly, Uluru originally sat at the bottom of a sea, but today it stands 348 metres above the ground, with 2.5kms of its bulk underground. It's 3.6km long, 1.9km wide, and has a 9.4km girth. No matter what time of year, and whether its dusk or dawn, night or day, Uluru puts on a beautiful show – glowing in her sheer vastness and breathtakingly beauty.

For more information, visit: ayersrockresort.com.au

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Katherine Gorge is within the awe-inspiring Nitmiluk National Park. Choose your own adventure in the series of thirteen stunning sandstone gorges that rise up into the sky like the ruins of ancient cathedrals painted in all shades of vivid sunset reds and oranges. Whether exploring the park on foot, canoe, boat or helicopter, there is a jawdropping vista at every turn. Make sure to stop by Nitmiluk Visitor Centre to learn out about the cultural and spiritual significance of the region for its traditional owners, the Jawoyn and Dagomen people.

For more information, visit: parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au

About 170km from Darwin in the Mary River National Park Wetlands, is a place that adds a taste of luxury to an outback adventure. Wildman Wilderness Lodge is an ideal base from which to explore Kakadu and to embark on an adventure with Matt, especially if you catch a small plane to the lodge.

Wildman is spread out like a meandering homestead on red dirt plains, with 15 large safari-style glamping tents (with fans, floorboards and ensuite) and 10 air-conditioned luxurious cabins (called Habitats). Its pool beneath the sprawling sky and the open-plan restaurant with floor-to-ceiling windows, are a welcome oasis in the desert, overlooking the airstrip where guests can fly in for lunch or for a longer stay.





Wildman is an impressive example of recycling, with its core buildings and cabins created from the materials, fixtures and structures that once made up Wrotham Park Station resort in Far North Queensland. When the station closed down in 2009, a team of builders dismantled the resort and moved it by 18 triple road trains across the outback, to where it now stands, resurrected on the wetlands of Mary River.

Guest can simply relax, surrounded by an abundance of wildlife and wonderful outback terrain, or they can partake in Wildman's tours, such as Home Billabong that takes in the wildlife, including crocs, or a fishing trip aimed at hauling in a prized barramundi. At dusk, guests can also head to Leichardt Point, where staff set up a table of cheese and nibbles, and crack open some bubbles and beers to watch the sun set over the wetlands. As the sun slips towards the horizon, its last rays dousing the swamps, speargrass and spinifex in a golden warmth, kangaroos, wallabies and birds play on the plains.

Looking out at it all – that seemingly never-ending expanse of land that is the Northern Territory Outback – is as close as you can get to touching the imperceptible ancient spirit of Australia. □



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FAST FACT

ALFREDO MARTINEZ FERNANDEZ took the stunning photos in our feature on Puebla, Mexico.

He studied photography in Mexico City while also completing a degree in archaeology and anthropology. He has travelled to more than 60 countries while on assignment and on expeditions, and is part of the Red Bull photography team, shooting athletes and extreme sports. He likes working with antique photography techniques like wet plate collodion and albumen printing.





Born in Nigeria and of Irish parents, **BRIAN JOHNSTON** was destined to become a travel writer. He has lived in Switzerland, the UK and China, and is now an Aussie citizen, despite disliking vegemite and cricket. Brian is the author of three travelogues, a freelance writer, and two-time winner of the prestigious Australian Travel Writer of the Year award. An avid skier, hiker and river-cruise enthusiast, he admits to being a chocoholic, sinophile and apostrophe pest. Read his blog at thoughtfultravelwriter.com



It took **MIRANDA LUBY** years of avidly diarising her overseas voyages before putting two and two together and making the plucky leap from news journalist to freelance travel writer. She cites her finest achievement as refining the contents of her backpack for a recent six-month-long trip down to 11kg, and has haggled under the pressure of a hurried mental currency conversion in more overseas markets than she can count. She spends most of her time on Victoria's coast and is currently attempting to surf.



DAVID MCGONIGAL was nearly stepped on by an elephant while sleeping in a tent on his first night in Africa, and has loved the continent and its wildlife ever since. "It's like a strange parallel to Australia where dingoes have been replaced by lions, and kangaroos by giraffes and zebras," David says. "To show my wife Sandra the joys of a Botswana safari after the cultural intensity of Europe and the scenic splendours of Canada became a highlight of my travelling life."





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